

## 2019 Allan Fels Mental Health Award

### Winner: Black Dog Institute

#### A Framework for Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing

##### Origins and principles

Black Dog Institute (BDI) is a leading provider of evidence-based workplace mental health and wellbeing programs promoting workplace wellbeing and psychological safety. Black Dog's mission, which is to create mentally healthier lives and mentally healthy workplaces, is a huge part of that.

While 1 in 5 Australians will experience mental illness at some point, over 50% of Black Dog employees have disclosed a lived experience of mental illness. BDI translates the work of their workplace mental health research team into evidence-based programs to promote workplace mental health.

It is really important to BDI to practice what they preach and create a workplace that is psychologically safe. Employees are the organisation's most valuable asset. Black Dog identified that the development of a framework was essential in order to provide structured ways to prevent illness, intervene early when illness occurs, support staff who become ill and support staff when re-entering the workforce after illness.

Whilst general consensus from all staff surveys showed BDI already had clearly defined values and high levels of morale and trust, the organisation wanted to ensure their employees were also protected from vicarious trauma associated with work in mental health, reduce mental health risk factors and boost staff wellbeing. The framework needed to be underpinned by strong policies which were reviewed and implemented as part of the process including a Workplace Mental Health Policy, Anti-Discrimination Policy, Flexible Workplace Policy and Code of Conduct.

The resulting framework, informed by evidence-based research, values and input from employee opinion surveys, included initiatives to promote wellbeing, personal resilience, stigma reduction and help seeking and provide support to employees who become unwell. These initiatives are targeted at an organisational level, team level and individual level.

##### Implementation

The BDI People and Culture team developed and implemented a framework for mental health and wellbeing using evidence-based strategies to minimise the impact of known workplace risk factors and maximise the impact of protective factors. The framework translated research findings into a series of structural interventions and initiatives in a systematic approach, targeting all levels of the organisation to promote good mental health practices, prevent illness and support staff who become unwell.

##### *Mental Health*

BDI undertook a commitment to promote a sensitive and informed approach to mental health, ensuring that employees were aware of and responsive to the needs of those who are at risk of developing, having or recovering from a mental health problem. BDI recognised that mental health problems are common and that behaviour associated with some conditions may cause difficulties for the individual and for other staff. BDI committed to protecting the rights of staff with

mental health issues, removing barriers caused by misunderstanding, misinformation or lack of awareness of mental health issues.

The framework addressed mental health at 3 stages:

1. Promotion and prevention for healthy workers
2. Early intervention, disclosure and help seeking for at risk workers
3. Support for recovery and return for workers who becomes ill

BDI sought to implement initiatives that address each stage at an individual level, team level and broad organisational level. The framework was based on existing research which is grounded by evidence that a mentally healthy workplace can be achieved via interventions in six key domains:

#### 1. Designing and managing work to minimise harm

- Implementation of a flexible workplace program to enable people to have sustainable work-life balance.
- Designing roles with appropriate control-demand ratio to ensure employees have feasible resources (including time) to achieve the demands of their role. Jobs are reviewed biannually to ensure this ratio is continuously maintained.

#### 2. Promoting protective factors at an organisational level to maximise resilience

- Encourage a culture of flexibility by encouraging flexible work practices that meet people's needs.
- Strong anti-bullying policy and zero tolerance of bullying.
- Enhance organisational justice and transparency.
- Training for managers in resilience and Mental Health literacy.

#### 3. Enhancing personal resilience

- BDI offer evidence-based resilience training across their workforce as well as Mental Health literacy as an induction unit for all new starters.
- All staff are encouraged to take part in the self-care planning program. This includes a workshop informing them of the importance of self-care, teaching of self-care strategies and provides resources and encouragement on developing their own self care plan.
- Vicarious trauma training is tailored and provided specifically to all individuals and groups at risk
- Weekly opportunities to participate in physical activity, mindfulness and yoga.

#### 4. Promoting and facilitating early help seeking

- Managers are trained to notice concerning behavioural change and signs of illness.
- Disclosure is encouraged and welcomed throughout all communication related to performance and staff engagement.
- All staff have access to an Employee Assistance Program.

#### 5. Supporting recovery from mental illness.

Staff members who disclose a mental health problem are treated fairly, equally and consistently. BDI developed a series of reasonable adjustments and interventions that can be implemented in order to enable a person to remain in the workplace during the onset of illness and to support their recovery and return to work. Managers are trained and supported in the development of a support plan or return to work plan. The support plan is specific to the context and can include:

- Reasonable adjustments to work environment

- Reasonable adjustments to nature of work
- Reasonable adjustments to support and supervision
- Reasonable adjustments to workload and hours

6. Increasing awareness of mental illness and reducing stigma.

Even within the mental health sector, stigma and awareness can be improved. BDI hold and facilitate internal campaigns and mental health training to spread awareness and information. All staff are also invited to participate in lectures and lived-experience presentations. Are you OK Day and Exercise Your Mood week are major events observed by BDI. The Dogs at Work program is directly linked with the benefits to Mental Health.

### *Wellbeing*

The Black Dog Institute recognise a set of evidence-based actions to improve personal wellbeing as developed by the New Economics Foundation's 2008 Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project which aimed to analyse the most important drivers of mental capital and wellbeing. The outcome of this project was the 5 Ways to Wellbeing, which is used to inform employee wellbeing strategies. Initiatives in each of the 5 Ways to Wellbeing are provided at individual, team and organisational level and refreshed and renewed regularly according to interest and demand.

1. Connect: Strategies that help create social connections between employees.
2. Be Active: BDI recognises the positive impact that physical wellbeing has on mental health and provides opportunities for staff to be active.
3. Take Notice: Mindfulness is about being in the moment, noticing things around you, being aware of your emotions, and reflecting on your experiences. BDI offers weekly guided mindfulness sessions and employees have access to Raw Mindcoach (an evidence-based e-learning program created to develop vital psychological skills and boost resilience) for individual engagement.
4. Keep Learning: Strategies to enable staff to learn and experience new things.
5. Give: BDI provides staff with regular opportunities to act positively towards others with donation and collection drives for disadvantaged members of the community.

### *Culture*

BDI recognises that an organisation's values should set the tone for the company's culture and influences everything that an organisation does. Hence, workplace values and culture shapes the work environment, relationships, processes and overall engagement of the staff. The success of the framework is critically underpinned by the values of BDI and all initiatives need to align with the values.

### **Benefits and Outcomes**

BDI now have a robust framework which enhances the mental health and wellbeing of their workforce by minimising the impact of known risk factors and maximising the impact of protective factors. It is informed by 6 evidence based key domains and 5 ways to wellbeing. Success of the framework is being measured using HR metrics, focus group feedback and survey data.

By embedding elements of the framework strategies into induction and onboarding programs, professional development programs and performance management, BDI have seen a positive impact across all levels of the organisation.

The framework is supported by a Workplace Mental health Policy endorsed by the Leadership team.

Black Dog has used the following evaluation tools to measure the impact of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Framework:

1. Evaluation of sickness absence data
2. Numbers of work-related psychological injuries data
3. Return to work rates
4. Exit interviews
5. Staff turnover rates
6. An audit of mental health policies and procedures
7. Focus groups of employees
8. Employee engagement surveys

To capture and measure data and employee feedback critical to Black Dogs success, the Hogan Employee Opinion Survey is used to measure employee satisfaction and engagement. The results are used as an annual health check. Scores are represented as a percentage and are compared with Australian averages, giving a benchmark of employee satisfaction and alignment.

#### *Mental Health Risk Factors*

The annual employee opinion survey results show strong scores with improvement in job security, satisfaction and health and safety scores over the previous year. Implementation of the flexible workplace strategy is expected to show more improvement in the following year, with approximately 30% of staff having implemented a flexible workplace agreement giving them the ability to work flexibly to meet the demands of their life.

Analysis of the survey shows similar survey scores for staff who identify as having a lived experience and those who do not, showing similar levels of satisfaction and engagement between the two groups.

#### *Vicarious Trauma*

The Hogan survey can also be tailored to measure issues specific to the business and it was adapted to measure the risk of vicarious trauma at BDI. There is no Australian average for these questions but BDI's own scores are average and above and have shown an improvement

The overall outcome of the Framework for Mental Health and Wellbeing has been positive and has provided all employees with guidance and support in managing their own mental health as well as that of their colleagues. BDI have seen improved retention rates and a reduction in absenteeism over three years since the framework was implemented. BDI acknowledge there is still work to do and every year the survey gives new information about where new initiatives and strategies are needed.

### Summary

BDI developed a framework for managing and supporting the mental health and wellbeing of their workforce, using evidence based and informed strategies to minimise the impact of known workplace risk factors and maximise the impact of protective factors. All workplaces should strive to be psychologically safe and this framework provides tools and policies to do that.

# Framework for Mental Health and Wellbeing

The Framework puts people at the centre of the workplace and uses evidence-based strategies to minimise the impact of known workplace risk factors and maximise the impact of protective factors in order to create a mentally healthy workplace.

