



Get it right! Managing Employees with a Mental Illness.

A recent guide published by the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) found that while Australian employers are generally supportive of workers with mental illness, there is a need for guidance on how to manage these employees effectively.

Disability Discrimination Commissioner Graeme Innes said, *"I believe, not only that all Australians have a right to work and are entitled to a safe and healthy workplace, but that there must be a commitment from everyone in the workplace – employers and workers – to achieving this."* Commissioner Innes said he believed that 'Workers with mental illness: a practical guide for managers' would help improve the capacity of managers and employers to manage OHS issues, treat all employees fairly and ensure safer workplaces for all Australians.

After cancer and heart disease, mental health problems are the third biggest health problem in Australia, with anxiety and depression leading the reported mental health issue list.

One in five Australian adults experience mental health problems each year and despite this shocking statistic, almost half of senior managers surveyed believed that none of their workers experienced mental health problems at work.

There is a real business case for managing employees who suffer from mental illness. The AHRC report estimated that stress related workers compensation claims cost in excess of \$10 million per year. In addition to this cost, businesses lose billions of dollars each year by not implementing early intervention strategies.

The guide suggests a number of practical strategies for employers managing employees with mental illness or suspected mental illness. The strategies are based on the principles of effective and open communication, making reasonable adjustments and focusing on pragmatic solutions.

The guide has been released after extensive consultation with the business community, trades unions, disability organisations, workplace safety bodies and employers. It has been endorsed by Safe Work Australia, the Fair Work Ombudsman, beyondblue: the national depression initiative, SANE Australia and the Mental Health Council of Australia.

It is available online at:

www.humanrights.gov.au/disability_rights/publications/workers_mental_illness_guide.html



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