

# The *beyondblue* National Depression in the Workplace Program



Research conducted by:

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## Background

*beyondblue: the national depression initiative* has developed, implemented and evaluated a national program designed to address the issue of depression and other related disorders such as anxiety and substance misuse in workplace settings. The *beyondblue* National Depression in the Workplace Program derived from the need for organisations to be better informed and equipped to appropriately and effectively manage depression. This is vital to ensure that people with depression are safe, and supported to access timely treatment to promote their recovery and return to work.

The program has been evaluated and proven to be effective in increasing awareness and knowledge, reducing stigma, and importantly, increasing employees' competence and confidence to take a proactive approach to appropriately manage depression. Ultimately this will reduce the personal, social and economic cost of depression throughout Australia.

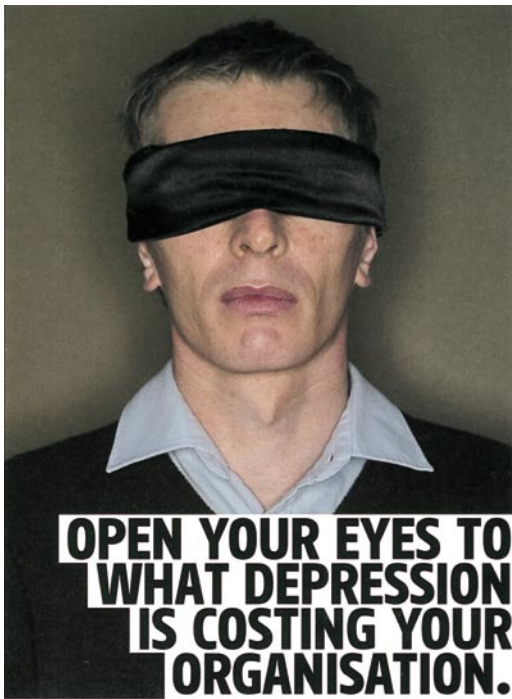
This document provides an outline of the key elements of the *beyondblue* National Depression in the Workplace Program, together with demonstrated outcomes.

## Depression in the workplace: the facts

More than one million people in Australia experience depression, anxiety or related substance use disorders each year<sup>1</sup>.

With depression affecting one in five people at some point in their adult lifetime, these figures also transfer to workplace settings. Depression is second only to heart-related illness in terms of disability in Australia<sup>2</sup> – resulting in a profound impact on all aspects of life, including work.

The impact of these disorders on organisations is considerable. For example, depression accounts for three to four days off work per month for each person experiencing depression – that's over six million working days lost each year in Australia. Untreated depression can result in a significant reduction in work performance. Depression accounts for more than 12 million days of reduced productivity each year, with serious implications for work safety<sup>1</sup>.



It is estimated that each employee with untreated depression will cost their organisation \$9,660 per year<sup>3</sup>.

Depression and related illnesses, including anxiety and substance misuse, are not managed well across organisations. In fact, many current management practices, such as recommending taking time off work or a holiday may only compound the problem and make the situation worse.

## The *beyondblue* National Depression in the Workplace Program

The *beyondblue* Workplace Program is tailored to meet the specific needs of organisations and has been extensively evaluated across a range of settings throughout Australia.

The program can operate in one of two ways. A *beyondblue* accredited trainer can either:

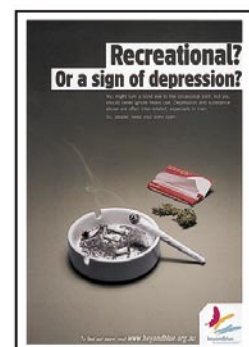
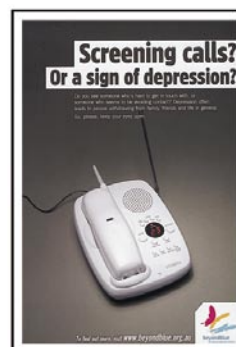
- Train staff directly or
- Train specific staff members to deliver the program across the organisation.

The results of the program are then extensively evaluated.

Recent *beyondblue* research shows that most people know very little about psychological conditions, the common signs and symptoms and how to recognise that a work colleague may be experiencing depression or related disorders. The *beyondblue* training program provides in-depth understanding together with practical strategies with respect to:

- Understanding the nature of depression, anxiety and related substance misuse
- Recognising signs and symptoms
- Responding appropriately in an efficient, effective and supportive manner
- Promoting and assisting the employer or employee to access appropriate support and healthcare, including Employee Assistance Programs or specialist services.

Key learning objectives of the program are reinforced through the distribution of specific *beyondblue* information, educational and reference materials throughout the workplace.



*beyondblue* Workplace Program posters

## Evaluation

Evaluation is a critical aspect of the *beyondblue* Workplace Program, with a detailed evaluation report provided to the organisation on completion. Subject to the organisation's interest, evaluation may include baseline assessment, immediate pre and post training and follow-up assessment. Organisational data can be compared with that of the general population, derived from the *beyondblue* Depression Monitor<sup>4</sup>.

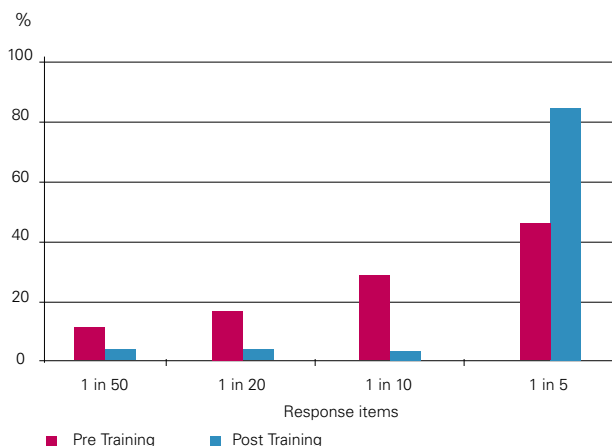
## Key Program Outcomes

A survey of 1,213 employees from government and non-government agencies produced the following results:

### ✓ Increases awareness, knowledge and understanding

The *beyondblue* Workplace Program increases awareness of depression within the context of other health problems. Training significantly increases awareness and understanding of signs and symptoms of the illness, prevalence rates, risk factors and how to access effective treatments.

**Fig 1: What proportion of people experience depression at some point in their adult lifetime?**



Over 50% of participants underestimated or did not know that depression affects one in five Australians prior to training. This awareness significantly increased following implementation of the *beyondblue* Workplace Program.

### ✓ Corrects myths and misconceptions

Training enables participants to more clearly understand depression and conceptualise it as an illness, differentiating depression from normal sadness or 'stress'.

In particular, the *beyondblue* Workplace Program challenges the concept of 'workplace stress' and management practices commonly used to address this, e.g. taking time off work across organisational settings.

*"I thought giving time off would be helpful, I never considered how this would increase isolation and make it harder to return to work."*  
Manager, Workcover

### ✓ Helps employees understand what it's like to live with depression

The program draws upon *beyondblue* research<sup>5</sup> to provide participants with an insight into the lived experience of these illnesses, conveying their impact and highlighting the needs of people living with them. This results in participants being much more aware of helpful behaviours and more likely to identify responses which may be unhelpful, or even detrimental to recovery.

**Table 1: Ratings of helpful behaviours, pre and post training**

Item	Unhelpful		Helpful	
	Pre Training	Post Training	Pre Training	Post Training
Keep out of their way and give them some space	72% (728)	97% (987)	28% (287)	3% (28)
Encourage them to take time off work or a holiday	21% (207)	51% (509)	79% (797)	49% (495)
Encourage them to focus on the positive things in life	21% (207)	66% (673)	92% (928)	33% (338)

Following training, there were statistically significant changes across all scales. In particular, participants indicated more accurate knowledge about helpful versus unhelpful behaviours.

### ✓ Improves attitudes, reduces stigma

A key success of the *beyondblue* Workplace Program is the significant reduction of stigma towards colleagues experiencing depression. This outcome is critical because attitudes play a key role in achieving behavioural change and broader acceptance. In particular, there is increased social participation of employees and less critical perceptions of people who may experience depression.

**Table 2: Level of comfort in engaging with someone with depression**

Item	Not Comfortable		Comfortable	
	Pre Training	Post Training	Pre Training	Post Training
Approach them and see what's wrong	11% (115)	3% (32)	64% (664)	81% (836)
Follow them up and see if they're OK	6% (63)	2% (22)	75% (775)	83% (861)

There were statistically significant changes pertaining to participants feeling much more comfortable assisting a person following the *beyondblue* training.

✓ **Increases knowledge about appropriate behaviours and management practices around depression**

Traditionally, depression and related conditions were only ever addressed in the context of work performance. The *beyondblue* National Depression in the Workplace Program equips staff with a range of skills and practical strategies to promote early detection and increase knowledge and confidence to support and encourage people to access appropriate help.

Effective and appropriate management is crucial to avoid discrimination, encourage help-seeking and promote optimal performance for employees and the organisation as a whole.

✓ **Increases willingness to engage and assist people to access appropriate help**

As well as increasing awareness and understanding of helpful behaviours, participant ratings of willingness and confidence to assist a person who may be indicating symptoms of depression significantly increased immediately following the *beyondblue* training.

Together with the provision of information about where and how to access help, greater willingness and confidence to engage ultimately increases the likelihood of employees actively accessing treatment either for themselves or supporting others to get help.

**Table 3: Pre and post training ratings of likelihood of engaging in helpful behaviours**

Item	Unlikely		Likely	
	Pre Training	Post Training	Pre Training	Post Training
Suggest they try and get hold of some self-help materials	22% (233)	16% (987)	77% (789)	84% (858)
Suggest they go to a Dr/health professional	8% (86)	3% (32)	92% (944)	97% (998)
Assist them to make an appointment with GP	33% (333)	23% (233)	67% (944)	73% (788)
Follow them up and make sure they got professional help	28% (288)	11% (116)	72% (735)	89% (907)

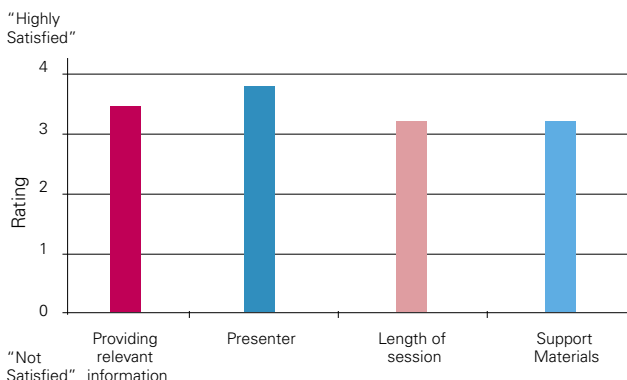
There were statistically significant changes pertaining to participants' greater willingness to actively assist people to access healthcare following the *beyondblue* training.

Seeking appropriate healthcare (either internal or external to the organisation) ultimately promotes recovery and improves productivity.

✓ **High levels of satisfaction with the program**

The training has been rated highly in terms of participant satisfaction.

**Fig 2: Rating of satisfaction with the *beyondblue* Workplace Program**



**Proven outcomes for your organisation**

**The *beyondblue* Workplace Program will lead to:**

- ✓ increased awareness and knowledge about depression and related disorders
- ✓ reduced stigma
- ✓ increased confidence to recognise, assist and manage depression and related disorders in the workplace
- ✓ increased willingness to assist and support colleagues to access appropriate healthcare.

These outcomes lead to:

- ✓ increased recovery
- ✓ reduced absenteeism
- ✓ increased productivity
- ✓ reduced costs to the organisation.

- 1 Andrews G, Hall W, Teeson M, and Henderson S. The Mental Health of Australians. Mental Health Branch, Com Dpt Health and Aged Care, 1999.
- 2 Mathers C, Vos T, and Stevenson C. The burden of disease injury in Australia. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 1999.
- 3 Caleo S and Hilton MF, Personal Communication, Queensland Centre for Mental Health Research, Policy and Economics Group.
- 4 Hightet NJ, Hickie IB and Davenport TA. Monitoring awareness of and attitudes to depression in Australia. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 2002 Vol 176 (Supp).
- 5 McNair BG, Hightet NJ, Hickie IB and Davenport TA. Exploring the lives of people whose lives have been affected by depression. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 2002 Vol 176 (Supp).

**For more information on the *beyondblue* National Depression in the Workplace Program contact Dr Nicole Hightet, Tel: 03 9810 6100 Email: [nicole.hightet@beyondblue.org.au](mailto:nicole.hightet@beyondblue.org.au)**

