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Driving business success for consulting firms in the built and natural environment

7 February 2022

National Workplace Initiative

Via email: nwi@mentalhealthcommission.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE – National Workplace Initiative Theory of Change and Evaluation Model

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the National Workplace Initiative's Theory of Change and Evaluation Model. I am writing on behalf of Consult Australia member businesses.

Consult Australia is the industry association representing consulting businesses in design, advisory and engineering, an industry comprised of over 58,600 businesses across Australia. This includes some of Australia's top 500 companies and many small businesses (97%). Our members provide solutions for individual consumers through to major companies in the private sector and across all tiers of government. Our industry directly employs over 285,000 people in architectural, engineering, and technical services, and many more in advisory and business support. It is also a job creator for the Australian economy, the services we provide unlock many more jobs across the construction industry and the broader community.

Consult Australia and its members are committed to [striving for mentally healthy workplaces](#). This includes creating environments that build confidence and acceptance of employees seeking help (removing perceived barriers a key here). However, we know that a myriad of pressures and external factors outside of an employer's control can also impede on the mental health of our workforce and the sustainability of our industry. Given this, we have advocated for clients (both public and private sector) to set the tone from the top and strive for a mentally healthy industry.

We have called on governments to adopt the principles outlined in our [Model Client Policy](#) to drive model procurement behaviours that support the sustainability and health of our industry. We have established an [End of Year Tender Deadlines Campaign](#) calling on agencies to implement a black-out period across Christmas and New Year, to give those we represent a well-deserved and uninterrupted rest over that period. Furthermore, we have called on the Commonwealth Government to mandate a collaborative procurement policy in line with our [Uplifting Productivity Report](#), recommending ways in which the Commonwealth government can maximise the economic benefits from projects via procurement reform.

With our members we have established Consult Australia's [mental health knowledge hub](#) including resources from our Mental Health Ambassadors and Mental Health Working Group. Members dedicated time to these because they genuinely believe that by making it easier for staff to address mental health concerns in the workplace, they can have a significant impact on the livelihood of their employees.

We support the development of a nationally consistent approach that focusses on how systems can continue to improve from micro through to macro levels to support the health and wellbeing of Australia's workforce. However, we have some concerns and queries regarding the evaluation models which we will share in response to the consultation questions.

Do these models reflect the broad logic of the change required to achieve mentally healthy workplaces on a national scale?

We support the theory of change focus on '*continual improvement at all levels of the system*' (that is macro, micro and meso). This recognises that everyone in the ecosystem has a role to play in ensuring the development of mentally healthy workplaces, and that efforts must continue as new learnings and challenges arise. However, we believe the evaluation models could be developed further. As we discuss below, we are concerned as to how meso stakeholders will support the mental health and wellbeing of

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their workers while they gather evaluation data which may be triggering for some participants. Additionally, we would like to understand how certain data will be captured. For example, we are unsure how accurate an assessment of presenteeism related to mental ill-health may be, given remote working throughout the pandemic and unavoidable distractions such as working with house mates/partners/children etc.

Do they capture the key opportunities for change?

To evaluate change, we believe we first need to assess the current status of mentally healthy workplace frameworks so a benchmark analysis can be conducted. Consult Australia intends to conduct a member survey on the current practices of workplaces. However, the questions we ask may be different to those the National Workplace Initiative evaluates. To ensure industry associations like Consult Australia can assist the National Workplace Initiative, it would be beneficial to have access to the evaluation questions. Organisations may also require further guidance on measurement frameworks and tools/templates such as the Program Objective example, or details of recommended surveys to be used across consulting organisations relative to the organization size. Our members report that organisations struggle with where to start in terms of obtaining data, evaluating data and then presenting the outcomes to employees.

Is this an approach that could be used to guide and evaluate other initiatives for mentally healthy workplaces?

A nationally consistent approach to evaluation of mentally healthy workplace initiatives would benefit industry associations such as ours by providing a benchmark for assessment and a consistent approach to assessing. However, as we highlight below believe the evaluation should start by finding out the mentally healthy workplace initiatives in practice now, so that a comparison can then be drawn across the nation.

I would be pleased to meet (virtually) with you to discuss this further, with senior leaders from the Consult Australia membership. I invite your office to contact me at kristy@consultaustralia.com.au or on 0499 878 839.

Yours sincerely,

Kristy Eulenstein
Head of Policy and Government Relations