

Jacobs

The below case study was provided for Consult Australia's [Striving for mentally healthy workplaces](#) report.

Case study: Jacobs ANZ mental health journey

Jacobs has been implementing mental health initiatives over the past 12 years. During that time, our overriding goal for these initiatives in Australia and New Zealand has been that they would create a working environment where our people can feel comfortable to ask for help.

Our mental health initiatives started with awareness raising through community events such as Movember, but as we, as an organisation, became more aware, we saw the need to do more to protect our people and to care for them if they were to experience a mental illness.

We stepped up the awareness raising with workshops run by beyondblue for all staff. We also partnered with Beyondblue to implement training for people managers to help them to better identify the signs of stress-related mental illness in the workplace. Through these initiatives, we realised that mental illness is common in the wider community (between one in four and one in six Australians and New Zealanders will experience a mental illness at some stage in their lives and this is higher for professional services firms). It would be naive to think that Jacobs would be immune from these sorts of statistics in our workforce.

A change in mindset

So rather than thinking we can prevent mental illness in our workforce, we sought to normalise it. We moved to dial from being surprised at incidences of mental illness to expecting them. We continued to put measures in place to prevent working at Jacobs being the cause of mental illness in our people but also focused on what we could do to care for our people when the wider pressures of life were impacting on the mental health of our staff and/or their family members.

Like many organisations, Jacobs engaged an EAP to provide counselling services for employees. We also extended those services to direct family members of staff. We found that the utilisation of the EAP service increased as leadership in Jacobs ANZ spoke more openly about mental health. This included some members of leadership sharing their personal stories of their own battles with mental illness or those of family members. We have also had staff who have used the EAP service, volunteer to tell their story to demonstrate the value that EAP provides.

Over the years we have brought the discussion of mental health into new staff inductions so that on day one, new staff know that this is a key issue and that leadership is committed to helping staff. We have come a long way in reducing the stigma associated with mental illness but there is still a long way to go. There is still concern from some staff if they “put up their hand” and ask for help that it will be seen as a weakness or it will be a career limiting move. Continued visible leadership is needed to dispel these fears.

Proactive measures

Our training for our people has matured to be more focused on effective management of mental health through a series of sessions:

- Building resilience for all employees;
- Building resilience for managers; and
- Critical mental incident for managers.



mental health matters

These sessions come under our ‘Mental Health Matters’ program. This program crosses over with our Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) program under the Disability portfolio. We positioned mental health in this

way because we didn't want it to be just in the realm of HSE and/or HR. The focus of our D&I portfolios is to create an environment where people can bring their whole self to work. For so long, the stigma of mental illness resulted in exclusion rather than inclusion. In having it as an important component of one of our D&I portfolios, the focus changes to developing mechanisms and initiatives that include people with mental illnesses.

A program that originated in Jacobs UK that Jacobs ANZ is supporting is the *Positive Mental Health Champions* initiative. This program trains staff to be a first port of call in each office on mental health issues. Just like having a safety champion for each office.

Jacobs recently partnered with Medibio to use its Mental Health Check-in process. The check-in has been a hugely successful initiative. It has added objectivity to what we always suspected and has given our people a great tool to maintain their mental health or a plan to help them address the mental illness they are experiencing.



Had we used the statistics from the use of the EAP to estimate the percentage of our workforce suffering a mental illness, the estimate would have been less than 1.5% of our workforce. This is so far off the societal norm of between 20-30%. The Medibio check-in tool encouraged a much higher participation rate and opened our eyes to the real issues facing our staff. Some of the findings that came out of the Check-in were:

- Around 1,000 of our Australian staff participated in the check-in, which represents about 20% of our workforce in Australia. About 25% of that cohort were found to be experiencing moderate to high levels of clinical depression or anxiety. Only about 2% were being treated by a medical practitioner. Of the 25% of participants, 77% knew something was wrong but were unaware they had such a condition.
- For some of these people, the report they received from Medibio was the catalyst for discussing their issues for the first time with their families and having a plan to bring them back to full health.
- While the results are totally confidential, the fact that we implemented this initiative in Jacobs and the open culture we have tried to create, I have had a number of people contact me for a chat about their experience with mental illness and how they feel OK to talk about it in the workplace.
- The check-in run by Medibio has been a hugely successful initiative. It has added objectivity to what we always suspected and has given our people a great tool to either maintain their mental health or a plan to help them address the mental illness they are experiencing.

The findings, while confidential for the individuals, are aggregated up to a dashboard to better assist leadership in developing strategies to better meet the needs of our people. This initiative was presented to Jacobs' global leadership. It is now being implemented as a global initiative with the first wave being to make the check-in available to all staff in Asia-Pacific, India and the Middle East regions. Being the first engineering and environmental consultancy in the world to participate in the check-in demonstrates our commitment to mental health.

What next?

Our next challenge is to use what we have learned over the past 12 years to address a key issue that we are facing as a global organisation. As we move people around the globe on major project assignments, we need to address the mental side of those assignments with staff being isolated from their natural support networks of family, friends and regular social settings. We don't have the answers yet, but this is our next major focus for caring for the mental health of our people.