



# **An organisation's guide to supporting the recovery-at-work and return-to-work of a worker experiencing a psychological illness or injury - Checklist One: For small to large organisations**

A tool to support the Victorian Mentally Healthy Workplaces Framework

Victorian Government



## **Acknowledgement of Country**

We acknowledge the First Peoples of the lands and waters across Victoria and their ongoing strength in practising the world's oldest living culture. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters on which we live and work and pay our respect to their Elders past and present.

We recognise that poor mental health disproportionately affects First Peoples' communities. Further, there are long-lasting, far-reaching and intergenerational consequences of the dispossession of First Peoples and their Country that are a direct result of colonisation and the establishment of the State of Victoria. This history, and the systems it gave rise to, continue to harm First Peoples today. It is only through community-led approaches to supporting healing and structural transformation to enable true self-determination that we can begin to right the wrongs of the past.

## **Disclaimer**

This guide is intended for general information and guidance purposes only and should not be considered or relied upon as an official compliance tool or advice. Using this guide does not ensure compliance with Occupational Health & Safety (OHS) regulations under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004. Additional resources such as those provided by WorkSafe Victoria need to be considered / adopted to abide by regulations.

While efforts have been made to ensure information presented is accurate and reliable, it is important to note that laws, regulations and requirements can change over time and may vary by jurisdiction.

This guide does not constitute legal, professional or regulatory advice. It is recommended that you consult the appropriate jurisdictional resources and consult with qualified legal or compliance professionals if you require specific compliance and regulatory guidance.

## **Acknowledgement of Lived and Living Experience**

We acknowledge people with lived experience of mental ill-health and recovery and the experience of people who have been carers, families, or supporters. Some of the most powerful evidence to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System came from the personal experience of people living with mental ill-health, their families, and carers. There has been extraordinary determination and courage as people have revisited painful memories in the hope of shaping a better future for themselves and others. We and other Victorians are deeply appreciative for this.

This website uses language to describe and discuss themes and concepts relating to mental health, but we acknowledge others might use different words to communicate their experience which are also valid.

## **Crisis support services**

If you or someone you know or work with are experiencing a mental health crisis, please contact one of these 24 hours, 7 days services

Lifeline: 13 11 14  
Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467  
Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636  
MensLine Australia: 1300 789 978  
QLife: 1800 184 527 (3pm to midnight daily)  
Kids Helpline: 1800 551 800  
13YARN: 13 92 76

# Checklists

There are two checklists of items and actions to support you:

- Checklist One is designed for small to large organisations.
- Checklist Two is designed for sole traders

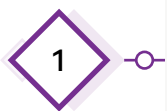
Only complete the checklist relevant to you. The checklists contain links to important resources and information as well as handy tips. on actions you and your organisation can take to support recovery-at / return-to-work.



The checklist is divided into two parts: 'Initial first steps' (three questions), and 'Next Steps' (nine questions).

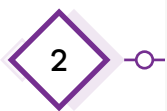
The checklist will take about ten minutes to complete, however, you are encouraged to take your time in accessing all the recommended resources and information.

## Initial Steps



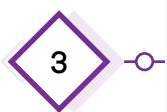
I have checked in on the wellbeing of my worker after an injury or illness to see how they are doing

Yes  No



I have spoken to my worker about the options for their recovery-at-work / return-to-work and the next steps

Yes  No



I have spoken to my worker about their preferences for remaining- at- / returning-to -work

Yes  No



**1. Tip:** Consider how much time and space may be needed for each worker to process their illness or injury before reaching out. In most cases, early contact from the employer, just to connect and let them know you are thinking of them is most helpful.

Likewise check with the worker about frequency and mode of check-ins (phone, email, text, in-person) that will be helpful for them to remain connected with work and the team.

- 2. Tip:** Consider any risks or stressors within the workplace that may have contributed to the worker's injury or illness and consider how they may be mitigated in the future.

This can assist the worker who is returning or recovering at work and can reduce the risk for others.

Ask about confidentiality – what (if anything) the worker might like shared with team members. Respect their right to privacy and confidentiality. Developing a confidentiality statement together with the worker can help provide clarity on the boundaries of privacy and what (if anything) is ok to share and 'how' it is to be shared.

- 3. Tip:** Approaching a worker check-in conversation:

**Example of how not to approach a check-in conversation:** "Hey, hope you're feeling better. Work is busy at the moment so just wanted to check when you'll be coming back?"

**Example of how you might approach a check-in conversation:** "Hi there, have I called you at an ok time? I just wanted to check in to see how you are feeling and if there was anything you needed."

[Future/Next conversation] **Repeat above check-in conversation, and:** "I also wanted to touch base to check-in on your preferences around working arrangements and how we can best accommodate your needs. Would you like to take time off, or are you thinking you'd like to remain at work? Either option is fine, and we will make it work... we just want to make sure we can support you in whatever choice you make".

FairWork information to support you in preparing for and having difficult conversations in the workplace:

- [Difficult conversations in the workplace - employee course](#)
- [A manager's guide to difficult conversations in the workplace](#)

There is also research evidence outlining the differences in impact in return-to-work experiences for people of different genders and those who have different home responsibilities.

This includes the differences in recovery when an injured worker has additional stressors if they are the only or the main source of income for their family, or if they have additional home-related work and care demands. Consider these factors when having your conversations.

## Next Steps

1

I am aware of WorkSafe Victoria resources outlining the process of how to support a worker with a psychological worker recovering-at-work / returning-to-work

Yes  No



- 1. Tip:** if you are unsure of how to approach the process of recovery-at-work or return-to-work, you can also seek independent advice through Fair Work Australia or the Fair Work Helpline for employers.
- 2. Tip:** it is best to have a planned approach that is documented – see below (Step 4)

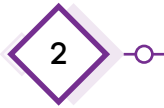
Comprehensive information on supporting an worker return to/ recover at work can be found here:

- [www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/return-to-work](http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/return-to-work)

Helpful guide for organisations:

- [www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/resources/practical-guide-return-work-employers](http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/resources/practical-guide-return-work-employers)
- [www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/resources/guiding-you-through-return-work](http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/resources/guiding-you-through-return-work)





I am familiar with my legal obligations to support recovering/returning workers with a psychological injury and how to meet them

Yes  No



**1. Tip:** Be familiar with and understand your legal obligations at the beginning of your worker's recovery-at-work / return-to-work journey to ensure you meet these obligations.

If your organisation operates across multiple jurisdictions, you should also be familiar with the relevant legal obligations of that jurisdiction. For example:

- For Queensland specific information visit Work Safe Queensland: [www.worksafe.qld.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au)
- For NSW specific information visit SafeWork NSW: [www.safework.nsw.gov.au](http://www.safework.nsw.gov.au)
- For Australian Capital Territory specific information visit: [www.worksafe.act.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.act.gov.au)
- For Northern territory specific information visit NT WorkSafe: [www.worksafe.nt.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.nt.gov.au)
- For Tasmania specific information visit WorkSafe Tasmania: [www.worksafe.tas.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.tas.gov.au)
- For Western Australia Specific information visit WorkSafe WA: [www.commerce.wa.gov.au/worksafe](http://www.commerce.wa.gov.au/worksafe)

Information on employers' legal obligations to support return to/recovery-at-work:

- [www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/employers-legal-obligations-during-return-work](http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/employers-legal-obligations-during-return-work)
- [www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/laws-and-regulations](http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/laws-and-regulations)

 3

As an employer, I am familiar with my role in supporting the recovery-at-work / return-to-work of my worker if they have a psychological injury

Yes  No



**1. Tip:** Encourage open and honest communication with the worker. To do this, you may wish to set up regular check ins with a standing agenda to be conducted with the worker's preferred person of choice (e.g., the Return-to-work Coordinator, worker's manager or other trusted person). See example agenda below:

- How are they going?
- What is working well?
- What can be improved/ changed?
- Check in about confidentiality to see if there have been any changes to the workers preferences. Respect their wish for privacy.
- Any upcoming appointments etc. that the workplace should be aware of to cater for time off?
- Other concerns/ points that need to be raised.

Information on your role as an employer:

- [www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/employer-return-work-roles](http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/employer-return-work-roles)



I am aware I need to create a 'return-to-work plan' with my worker and complete a 'Return-to-work arrangements form' to formally support my worker in their recovery-at/ return-to-work.

Yes  No



- 1. Tip:** if your worker is comfortable, you may wish to share the Return-to-work arrangements with the wider team so everyone is aware of the arrangements in place/necessary to support recovery-at-work / return-to-work. Where the worker does not wish for this information to be shared, ensure that there is a plan in place to maintain confidentiality.
- 2. Tip:** Although this template is called a 'Return-to-work' arrangements form, it can be used for planning your worker's recovery-at-work for a psychological injury with relevant modifications as required, even if a worker has not had time off work.
- 3. Tip:** While the template references some examples of workplace modifications for physical injuries, you are still encouraged to complete this form to cater for psychological illness or injury.

Information on completing a Return-to-work arrangements form:

- [www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/resources/return-work-arrangements-form](http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/resources/return-work-arrangements-form)

**Please note:** *There are no specific recovery-at-work templates – refer to the handy tips.*



5

I am aware that I need to appoint a 'Return-to-work Coordinator' to assist the worker to remain at work while they recover-at- or return-to-work as soon as possible.

Yes  No



**1. Tip:** Alongside your formal 'Return-to-work-Coordinator' you may also wish to introduce a buddy for the worker recovering-at-work / returning-to-work.

For example, assign someone the returning worker will be working closely with to act as a 'buddy' who helps ensure that daily tasks are appropriate, that time is made for the worker to attend appointments, that they are given appropriate rest when necessary, etc. This buddy may also act as a conduit between the worker and management to support the worker in raising any concerns or challenges they may be having if they do not feel comfortable raising these on their own.

Information on the roles of Return-to-work Coordinators and who can be one:

- [www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/resources/return-work-coordination-basics-you-need-know](http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/resources/return-work-coordination-basics-you-need-know)

6

I know where to go to find additional resources to help me solve recovery-at-work / return-to-work problems should they arise (e.g., if I am unable to modify my worker's tasks to suit their recovery needs.)

Yes  No

Resources to solve common return-to-work problems:

- [www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/resolving-return-work-issues](http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/resolving-return-work-issues)
- [www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/solve-common-return-work-problems](http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/solve-common-return-work-problems)

7

I have downloaded the Work Safe Victoria posters to display in the workplace to raise awareness about the importance of recovery-at-work / return-to-work.

Yes  No

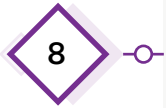


- 1. Tip:** Run your own awareness raising activities such as weekly / monthly reminders during team meetings, information sheet handouts (like the information presented in the Quick Facts section above).

### Psychological injury

- [www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/resources/return-work-poster-psychological-injury](http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/resources/return-work-poster-psychological-injury)





I have taken the time to speak to other workers who may have been involved in the incident which led to the injury / illness of the worker and have directed them to / am supporting them to access the appropriate resources if required.

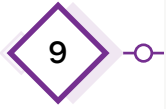
Yes  No



- 1. Tip:** If an incident has occurred at work which has led to an illness or injury, or your worker recovering-at- / returning-to-work is recovering from a sensitive issue, it is a good idea to check in with your broader team members to ensure they are also coping. The psychological illness or injury of a co-worker can be triggering for other workers. You must however maintain confidentiality at all times.
- 2. Tip:** There are several mental health resources you can direct your workers to, including:
  - Lifeline (crisis support) [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)
  - Black Dog Institute (for emergency service workers and volunteers) [www.blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au)
  - Beyondblue [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)
  - Your organisation's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) if you have one

A resource to find extra help for your teams and colleagues

- [www.vic.gov.au/where-find-support-yourself-or-your-colleagues](http://www.vic.gov.au/where-find-support-yourself-or-your-colleagues)



I have / am preparing the workplace and the team for the worker's recovery-at-work / return-to-work through a range of activities.

Yes  No



- 1. Tip:** Depending on the size of your organisation, ensure you have prepared the individuals or teams the worker will work with for their return. Activities to prepare your workplace and team include:
  - Team meeting/s to discuss an worker's recovery-at- / return-to-work plan (where appropriate) of a recovering / returning worker so everyone is familiar with what will happen
  - Providing clarity to the team on the roles they may play in supporting the worker's recovery-at- / return-to-work. For example, some immediate team members may need to play more active roles in supporting an individual's mental wellbeing by frequently checking in with the worker
  - Making modifications to certain policies and procedures to accommodate the worker's illness or injury (for example, allowing more frequent or extended breaks)
  - Ensure that you maintain confidentiality for any concerns that the worker would like to keep private and encourage other workers not to question the injured worker beyond the information that they have chosen to share.
- 2. Tip:** Whilst it is important to make arrangements which meet their needs, do not treat the worker differently or make them feel excluded. For example, organise work events which specifically consider their circumstance and cater for their needs instead of events where they will be treated differently to their colleagues in order to participate.



## Additional Tips

### Quick Tips for supporting recovery-at / return-to-work from psychological illness or injury

- Provide new training and learning opportunities where previous roles and capabilities may not be suitable for the worker for a period of time (e.g., high stakes or high stress situations)
- Check in regularly to see how the person experiencing the psychological illness or injury is feeling and how they are experiencing work, noting that their needs and preferences are most likely to change over time.
- In consultation with the worker, review and modify daily tasks, particularly tasks which may be unhelpful or triggering for an individual experiencing psychological illness or injury. This may include; decrease the frequency or durations of meetings, decrease the frequency of client/customer interactions, provide longer time-frames to complete tasks, provide written instructions (not just verbal), provide regular rest breaks, encourage walk and talk meetings, etc.
- Look at modifying/ reducing working hours / providing flexible work arrangements including working from home.
- Consider developing a confidentiality statement with the worker and reviewing it regularly.
- Be supportive and understanding of the worker's lived/living experience
- Make arrangements to accommodate worker attending appointments to support their recovery (e.g., scheduling client meetings around these appointments. The best practice is to ask the person what will be most helpful to them to support their recovery)
- Establish 'liaison' or 'peer' roles to support workers from culturally diverse communities
- Ensure the workplace is accessible and safe to accommodate the given illness or injury (i.e., Is the lighting helpful or does it need to be modified? Is the workspace too noisy or quiet?)
- Support your worker in accessing additional resources and support if they require
- Encourage open and honest conversations.



**Please note:** This guide is specific to a Victorian context and does not cover processes, policies and legal requirements of other States and Territories. Organisations that operate across different States and Territories are advised to understand processes, policies and legal requirements of each jurisdiction as appropriate.