**Wellness in the Workplace**

From the deafening isolation of lockdowns to the impossible multi-tasking of working from home, the challenges of the past two years have arguably changed the way Australians live and work forever.

In terms of our emotional health, a recent survey from [Australia’s Mental Health Think Tank](https://mentalhealththinktank.org.au/research/) found that as a result of the Pandemic, Australians are actually still experiencing “deteriorating” levels of mental health, including a rise anxiety and depression. And mental health helpline, Lifeline, continues to field around 90,000 calls every month (that’s a call every 30 seconds).

“Australians have struggled over the past two years because when our minds are uncertain, we get exhausted really quickly,” explains psychologist (and yoga teacher) Dr. Kaitlin Harkess. “And, really, I think we’re all tired and fatigued.”

Adding to this, she says, the work life of many Australians has had to adapt to the shifting goal posts presented by the uncertainties of pandemic life.

Working from home – once the novelty of early lockdowns – has become a reality and necessity in many households. Not surprisingly, [recent data](https://www.news.com.au/finance/work/at-work/surprising-data-reveals-the-working-habits-of-australians/news-story/016a591370ed2e90ae5350414b14fdc6) released from the Australian Bureau of Statistics reveals that 40 per cent of employed Australians still regularly work from home.

**The WFH effect**

This change in office environment – and subsequently – office culture has led many companies to shift their focus to employee health in an effort to avoid the “[great resignation](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/03/09/majority-of-workers-who-quit-a-job-in-2021-cite-low-pay-no-opportunities-for-advancement-feeling-disrespected/)”. Their biggest challenge? According to Harkess, it’s being able to recognise the signs when employees might actually be struggling.

“In a work context, you might see individuals finding it hard to pay attention the way they used to, perhaps errors are being picked up, they aren't meeting the targets they would historically meet due to difficulty focusing,” explains Harkess. “Emotionally, people might seem like, they're closer to tears.”

If you do notice that your staff might be suffering, Harkess advises emphasising “rest” as a recovery tool, as well as stepping away from the idea that to be successful, everyone needs to work longer hours.

“We've forgotten how to rest, and I think business owners can actually be encouraging their employees to rest in really deliberate ways,” she says. “Studies show that people work more effectively if they're able to focus for a shorter amount of time, then step away from the project for a moment.”

**Wellness strategies**

Shea Morrison, CEO of the [Goodnight CO](https://www.thegoodnightco.com.au/) agrees. The Brisbane-based sleep expert has spearheaded workplace flexibility in her company, as well as work-from-home Fridays. During the height of the Pandemic, she even had an employee bed available for quick naps and meditation.

For Morrison, implementing a “holistic” strategy that works with the company’s value system is the key to wellness workplace, adding that wellness strategies don’t have to be complicated (or a “tick box exercise”), they just need to be a concerted and continued company-wide focus.

“It's one thing [as a company leader] to come out and say, ‘We’re doing all these initiatives’,” she says, “but then it obviously requires that follow-through to make sure you, as company leaders, don’t get caught up in the rabbit warrant of tunnel vision.”

Goodnight CO is just one of the thousands of Australian businesses that are looking to implement employee wellness strategies, however, according to Phil Hayes St Clair, CEO of [Drop Bio Health](https://www.dropbiohealth.com/), most are struggling to find the right one for their company.

“A lot of companies we see and work with at Drop Bio Health are finding it difficult to work out what's practical and what's fit for purpose for their workforce,” he says. “It's a real issue for them when you think about how personalised [the wellness offering] needs to be to be effective. At least that's a conversation I'm having with just about every single CEO of large and small businesses right now!”

**Encouraging healthy habits**

Finding a wellness strategy to suit each individual employee, and each individual company can seem overwhelming, but that, says Hayes St Clair, is where Drop Bio Health comes in.

“We play a role in two ways: the first one is that we provide access to specialist knowledge with our service, [Wellbeing for Teams](https://www.dropbiohealth.com/wellbeing-for-teams), which brings together world leading specialists via virtual events,” he explains. “These events help employees obtain better health knowledge so they can make better decisions.”

The second Drop Bio Health offering is their popular, science-first [blood collection kits](https://www.dropbiohealth.com/service), which just require a finger pick. The results of these collection kits can help build a profile of a person’s underlying health and can offer a unique snapshot of health markers, such as energy levels, inflammation, diet, stress levels and sleep quality.

With this information, and the virtual events on offer, employees can build on their healthy habits and see their long-term efficacy and benefits over time.

**Changing company culture**

However, Harkess’ initial advice for companies wanting to nurture employee wellbeing is to first take stock of the corporate culture in place, as it might actually be inhibiting employee (and company) growth.

“I think workplaces need to avoid perpetuating that ‘burnout mentality’, which suggests that if the company is going to succeed then people need to work harder and answer emails late at night,” she says.

Instead, Harkess firmly believes that for a company to grow they should match the level of stress (and those “crunch periods”) with periods of recharging and a focus on healthy habits.

“Otherwise,” she says, “employees may start to really suffer and you’ll see increased sick leave, as well as decreased performance. We need to be focusing on that great catchphrase: ‘Stress, plus rest, equals growth’, so we can learn how to work smarter.”

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