# Worker Recovery Toolkit

Supporting recovery of staff with a psychological injury:
a practical guide for employers and managers

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# Supporting recovery of staff with a psychological injury

**For most people, being at work has a positive effect on their mental health. However, work experiences can also have a negative impact on workers' mental health and, at times, this can lead to a psychological injury.**

When a worker has experienced a work-related psychological injury, their manager and employer can play a key role in ensuring they are able to recover as soon as possible.

Employees may return to work with the same employer (in the same role, a similar role, or a different role) or with a new employer, depending on recommendations of their treating clinician and certificate of capacity/fitness. Regardless of the situation, there are some key steps a manager or employer should consider when they have a worker recovering from a psychological injury.

# Key steps

**Research has shown that where employers and managers are invested in supporting recovery, the outcomes for all are greatly improved.** In the case of workers who have experienced a psychological injury, employers and managers should take certain steps to provide the best chance of the individual making as full a recovery as possible:

**1. Show empathy and care.** Genuine and empathic communication that comes from a place of unconditional positive regard is important to ensure sharing of sensitive information and managing vulnerability. Start this conversation early, at a time and place where they are able to share.

**2. Ensure that the injured worker has sought help from their GP** or other appropriate health professional (or encourage and facilitate this if it has not occurred).

**3. Facilitate reasonable adjustments** by modifying the worker's role/duties in accordance with their capacity and guided by recommendations from the worker's nominated treating doctor. In so far as is reasonably practicable the role should be the same or equivalent to the injured worker's employment at the time of the injury. These may include flexible work arrangements, additional support/assistance, or other options. Comcare's Providing reasonable adjustments has useful information to support this process. A more in-depth review of how to meet these requirements can be found via Safe Work Australia.

**4. Identify and address psychosocial hazards in the workplace** to eliminate psychosocial risks, or if that is not reasonably practicable, minimise them so far as is reasonably practicable. It is important you address psychosocial risks identified in the workplace, to ensure your worker is returning to a psychologically safe workplace. An existing psychological injury is likely to be considered to have put an employer on notice regarding the increased risk of further injury. Safe Work Australia's Model Code of Practice: Managing psychosocial hazards at work provides helpful guidance.

**5. Create a mentally healthy work environment** by ensuring the injured worker feels supported when considering their return to work and throughout the recovery at work process. Regular conversations are vital to ensure information is shared and support provided. It is also important for key discussions and decisions to be documented fully.

**6. During the risk management process,** stay alert to early warning signs as well as what the risk might look like and how it could be described.

*Note: Points above addressing psychosocial hazards and risk management are part of a business's ongoing management of psychosocial risk alongside responsive strategies where an injury has occurred.*
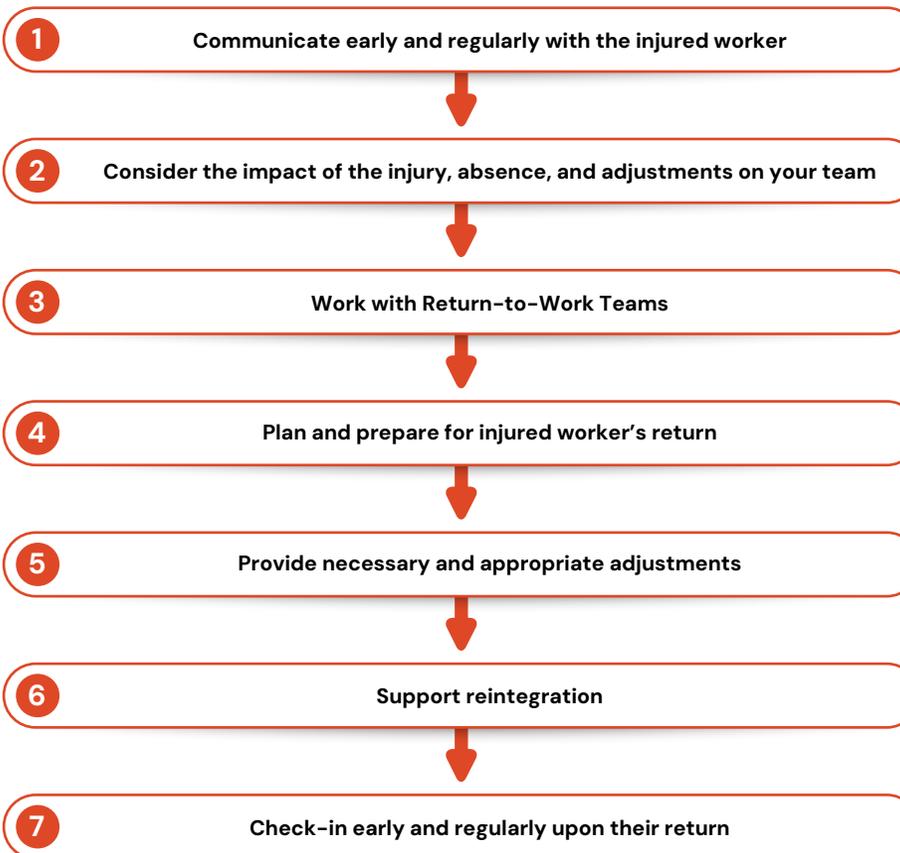
## What can you do as a manager or supervisor?

**Managers and supervisors play a critical role in supporting the mental health of injured workers.**

This might involve actions to reduce stigma around mental health in the workplace, recognising the early signs of worsening mental health in employees, having open and supportive conversations, being aware of mental health policies, return-to-work program, and additional support available within your organisation, building trust and ensuring confidentiality for workers who have experienced a psychological injury.

If sickness absence occurs it is important to work through each of the following steps.

1. Communicate early and regularly with the injured worker

2. Consider the impact of the injury, absence, and adjustments on your team

3. Work with Return-to-Work Teams

4. Plan and prepare for injured worker's return

5. Provide necessary and appropriate adjustments

6. Support reintegration

7. Check-in early and regularly upon their return

The following resources and information are available to assist managers and organisations in supporting people to stay at work and return to work after psychological injury:

- SIRA's Recovery at Work Toolkit
- How employers can prevent and respond to psychological injury in the workplace (SIRA)
- Mentally Healthy Workplaces online module Staying and returning to work
- Comcare's Supporting return to work (information for employers and managers)
- Safe Work Australia's Managing the relationship with an injured or ill worker during return to work: A guide for supervisors in small and medium businesses
- Safe Work Australia's Practical tools to support supervisors and improve return to work outcomes of injured or ill workers
- SIRA's Guidelines for workplace return to work programs
- SafeWork NSW code of practice for Managing Psychosocial Hazards in the Workplace
- Help prevent workplace injuries occurring through mental health training for managers and leaders with Black Dog Institute
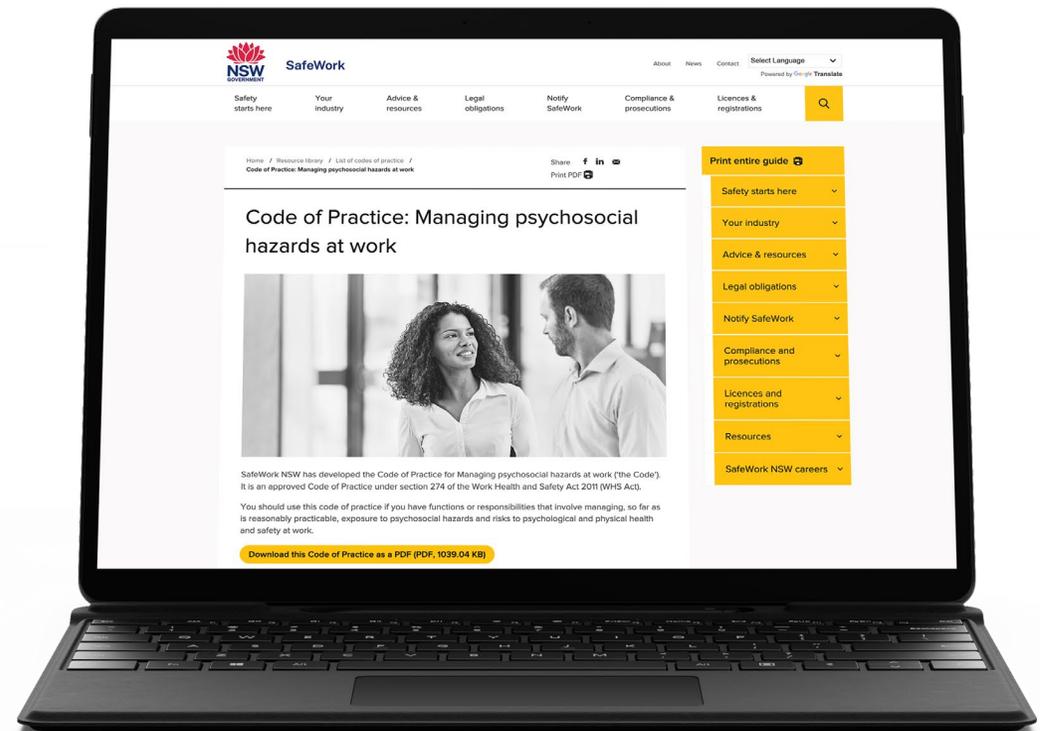
# Developing a plan for recovery

**Developing a plan for recovery at work or return to work is an essential step to facilitate the worker's recovery.**

This plan should be developed through collaboration between the worker, their supervisor or manager, and recommendations from their nominated treating doctor (via a certificate of capacity/fitness). Your insurer may also be able to assist by arranging a workplace assessment to identify suitable work options to match the individual's capacity, and/or suggested workplace modifications or training.

The following are useful resources for developing a recovery at work or return to work plan:

# Other support tools

**There are many other tools available to support recovery at work or return to work for individuals who have experienced a psychological injury.**

- SIRA's Recover at work tools for employers provides information and links to a range of helpful resources to aid employers in supporting the recovery at work process.

- Black Dog Institute's Mentally Healthy Framework helps employers understand the different interventions across the spectrum of mental health and the evidence supporting these programs.

- SIRA recently commissioned a review of the available tools that may be used to support recovery at work and return to work for those at risk of or suffering mental distress. You can find the Recovery at work support tools: Rapid Review on their website. ACAS UK conducted a similar review.
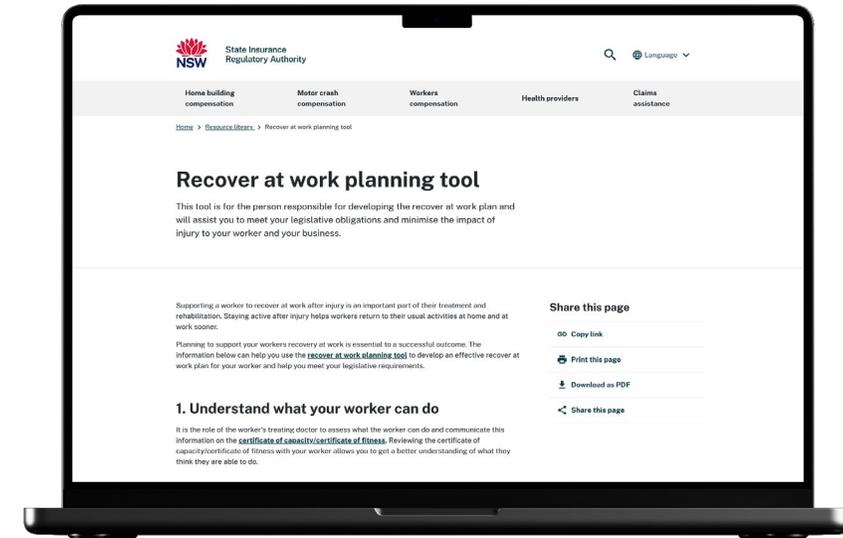
- Icare provide a guide to better understand the process of recovery at work.

- The Australian Human Rights Commission provide some useful strategies to managing mental health at work especially around reasonable adjustments.

# Training for workplaces

**The Black Dog Institute strives to make Australian workplaces mentally healthier through the translation of research into practical interventions.**

Backed by research, and delivered by experts, our workplace mental health programs are people focused and outcome oriented, giving your people practical skills to support mental health and wellbeing at work.

We offer a depth of expertise and experience, working with businesses of all sizes and industries across the country. Beyond training, we provide strategies to improve mental health and wellbeing at work that have a long-lasting impact

All our programs are evaluated to measure the impact of training on key indicators of a mentally healthy workplace and can support your organisation to:

- Design workplaces that promote good mental health
- Minimise risks to psychosocial safety
- Create a better work culture that is productive and engaged
- Build organisational and personal resilience
- Support recovery and return to work from sickness absence
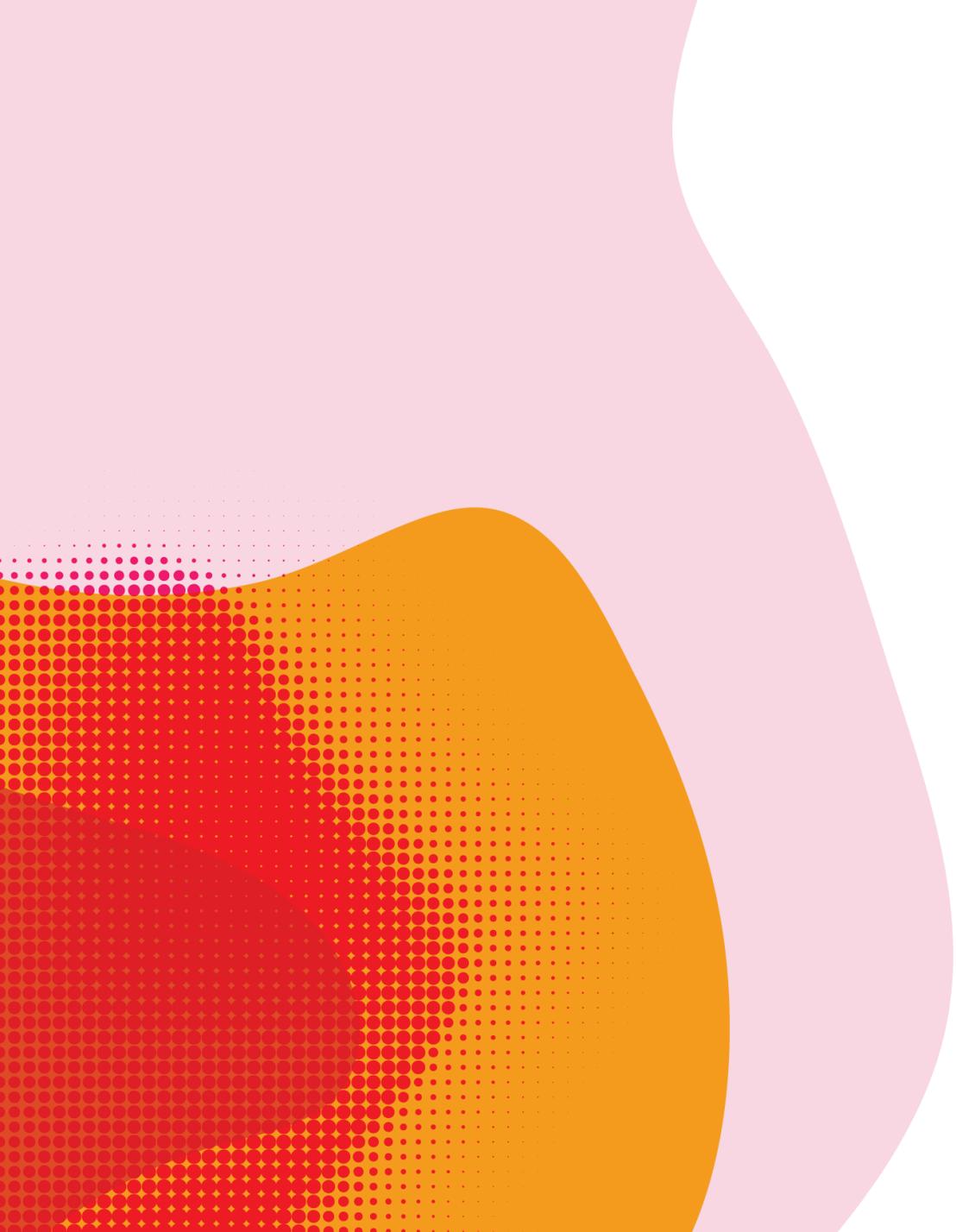
We can help workplaces:

**Improve overall wellbeing**      **Reduce absenteeism**      **Increase productivity**

To find out how we can help you create a mentally healthier workplace:

# We're here to help.

Get in touch to find out how we can help improve wellbeing at your organisation.