

Less stress strategies: what to do in your organisation

By [James Harkness](#) on 6 August 14

Organisations are increasingly aware of the costs associated with workplace stress and while some are attempting to tackle the issue, there's no "quick and easy fix". A leading Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) provider has revealed what you can do in your organisation.

[AccessEAP](#) recently revealed that Job insecurity and work overload were the main triggers of workplace stress in its client organisations followed by organisational change, conflict and bullying and harassment.



Some basic principles

In a subsequent conversation with WorkplaceOHS, the organisation's clinical services manager, Marcela Slepica said that how employers go about tackling workplace stress will depend on the specific stressors in their organisation. While admitting there was "no quick and easy fix", she said following some basic principles will put employers on the right track, namely:

- It is important for employers to recognise, firstly, whether or not workplace stress is an organisational problem and if it is, to acknowledge it — avoiding the problem or denying it exists won't protect employees.
- As different people experience stress in different ways, workplace stress should be dealt with on a case-by-case, individual basis. However, employers also need to recognise that the modern workplace is a generally stressful environment and that generic, whole-of-organisation strategies can help reduce stress.
- Individuals shouldn't be left to cope with workplace stress on their own — everyone should work together to address the problem.
- A culture of open communication and realistic, achievable demands and deadlines for employees should be fostered, otherwise work overload and the stress it creates will continue to exist.
- Leaders must role-model positive messages, be receptive to issues raised by employees and support them, and not tolerate bullying and harassment.
- Employees will benefit from education (e.g. how to recognise symptoms, where to go for help), stress management and resilience training and access to wellbeing programs that focus on healthy lifestyle practices as well as an Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
- Employees are in a very good position to identify at-risk colleagues (e.g. an energetic, outgoing worker who becomes withdrawn), because they interact on a daily basis, and it is very important that they are encouraged to do so.
- Employees are often reluctant to seek help for stress or to reach out to colleagues who they've identified as being at-risk. Reasons include a fear of embarrassment, a fear of the response they will receive, and the perception that suffering from stress is a career-limiting weakness. Increasing awareness of mental health in the workplace will help remove this

stigma and create a more open environment. The key is top-down communication that lets employees know that stress real, it happens and there's no shame or embarrassment in it.

The bottom line

Slepica said that employers who tackle workplace stress in their organisation will likely see increased productivity and higher returns, as well as less workplace conflict, less absenteeism, lower workers compensation costs and happier, more productive employees.

They will also protect their workers against the risk of physical ailments (e.g. headaches, gastro conditions, high blood pressure, and sleep disorders) as well as anxiety and depression.

Noting that the impact of mental health issues on productivity, participation and compensation claims is a \$10.9 billion cost, Slepica had a message for employers: The bottom line is that if your organisation is not investing in mental health, it's losing money.

Source: Workplace OHS

<http://workplaceohs.com.au/hazards/work-environment/analysis/stress#.U-K05PmSwcB>