

# Enhancing AOD workers' wellbeing: A literature review

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## Introduction

- Worker wellbeing is a key concern for many organisations in Australia and New Zealand, and is a pivotal workforce development issue.
- A healthy workforce is required to recruit and retain qualified staff, and to achieve organisational goals.
- Positive workplace conditions can enhance workers' wellbeing. However, stressful / unhealthy working conditions adversely impact wellbeing and organisational functioning.<sup>1</sup>
- Ill health and poor wellbeing is associated with significant fiscal costs to organisations.<sup>2</sup>
- Organisations also have legal responsibilities to ensure workplaces do not cause harm to the health of employees.<sup>3,4</sup>
- Although working in the AOD sector can be highly rewarding, it can also be emotionally challenging.
- A review of current evidence regarding AOD workers' wellbeing is therefore warranted.
- NCETA, in collaboration with NADA and Matua Raki, conducted a comprehensive literature review of AOD worker wellbeing.

## Aims

1. To examine:
  - Available evidence concerning the wellbeing of Australian and New Zealand AOD workers
  - Approaches to protect and enhance worker wellbeing
  - Tools to measure wellbeing
2. To inform the development of a workforce development survey of the AOD sector.

## Method

- A comprehensive review of the peer reviewed and grey literature was conducted.
- Electronic databases searched included: Premedline, Medline, Embase, PsychINFO, Nursing and Allied Health Database, Informit Health Collection, Cochrane Data Base, and Pubmed.
- Hand searches of study reference lists and searches of the grey literature were also conducted using conventional electronic search engines (e.g., Google and Google Scholar).



Worker wellbeing is "flourishing employees achieving their full potential for both their own benefit and that of their organisation"<sup>4</sup>

Worker wellbeing is more than simply the absence of negative circumstances. It also includes positive features related to the physical, material, social, and emotional dimensions of workers' lives, as well as characteristics of the workplace such as job security, work engagement, work/life balance and remuneration<sup>4</sup>.

## Results

### Strategies to enhance worker wellbeing

- Worker wellbeing policies
- Multifaceted health promotion programs
- Programs to enhance worker resilience
- Effective clinical supervision
- Ensuring that organisations are well managed
- Encouraging help-seeking behaviours in the workplace
- Programs to prevent and reduce stress and burnout
- Encouraging individual self-care approaches

### Tools for measuring wellbeing

- World Health Organization Quality of Life Survey: BREF
- Workplace Wellbeing Questionnaire by the Black Dog Institute
- Organisational Readiness to Change
- General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12)
- Shirom-Melamed Burnout Measure
- Therapeutic Optimism Scale
- The Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale
- The Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL)
- Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)
- Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS)

## Results (continued)

- Most literature is concerned with psychological wellbeing, rather than wellbeing more broadly (i.e., including physical wellbeing).
- AOD workers are generally faring well psychologically, but an estimated 10-30% experience psychological distress.
- AOD workers are also vulnerable to secondary traumatic stress (STS).
- Groups at particular risk include:
  - Younger workers
  - Managers
  - Indigenous workers
  - Workers with lower educational attainment levels
  - Those with a lived experience background.
- Despite this, less than two thirds of Australian AOD workers were found to have received training related to STS.
- AOD workers perform a wide variety of roles in differing organisations, with differing management capabilities and levels of organisational support. Workers also have different professional backgrounds and qualifications, and support different client groups.
- Therefore, their work experiences and degree of threat to their wellbeing will vary substantially.
- Initiatives to enhance wellbeing are most effective when they use organisational-directed measures, supplemented by individual-directed strategies.

## Implications

1. There is a need for enhanced clinical supervision and education and training to support AOD workers.
2. Strategies to enhance worker wellbeing should be designed and implemented at the organisational level and based on actual levels of worker wellbeing and the characteristics of particular organisations.
3. Younger, less experienced workers, managers and those lacking formal qualifications should be a priority for programs aimed at enhancing psychological wellness.
4. Creating resilience-promoting work environments can reduce negative outcomes and increase positive outcomes stemming from working in potentially demanding environments.



## References

1. PricewaterhouseCoopers. (2010). Workplace Wellness in Australia. Sydney: PWC.
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A full copy of the literature review can be found here:

