



association of  
consulting and  
engineering

A background photograph of a man and a woman on a wooden staircase. The man, in the foreground, is wearing a black t-shirt and blue jeans, looking down at a smartphone. The woman, in the background, is wearing a light-colored top and dark pants, smiling and looking at her phone. A large purple diagonal overlay covers the right side of the image, containing the title and subtitle.

# A PROFESSIONAL SERVICES CONSULTING SECTOR WHERE OUR PEOPLES' MENTAL HEALTH FLOURISHES

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What ACE New Zealand members are doing to  
provide mentally healthy workplaces

# introduction

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**“Our ultimate goal is a professional consulting services sector where our peoples’ mental health flourishes. This means a professional consulting sector renowned for its care and attention to the mental health and wellbeing of its people, a sector where every consultant feels mentally safe in their workplace, and a sector that attracts new talent because they know they can bring their whole self to work and their mental health will be prioritised.”**

Supporting mental health and wellbeing in the workplace has never been so important. More people than ever before are struggling with mental health conditions. This not only has human costs, but also significant costs for organisations.

## Spotlight on workplace design

Much of the conversation about mental health at work focuses on strategies and actions individuals can take for their own wellbeing and resilience. If we are to see systemic improvements, we need the conversation to also consider the role employers play in providing mentally healthy workspaces.

While many employers are aware of the importance and benefits of creating mentally healthy workplaces and taking steps to protect the mental wellbeing of their people, it can be hard to know where to start. Members have been seeking ACE New Zealand’s leadership and support to address this increasingly urgent systemic issue.

We’re working to help our member businesses design mentally healthy workplaces, so together we can grow a professional services consulting sector where our people’s mental health flourishes. We want to create a movement for change. To do this requires understanding the current state of mental health in our workplaces, creating structures around how organisations can and should be responding to this issue in the most effective way, introducing accountability, and providing resources and connections to experts to help our members action change. Our focus is on organisational responsibility in the design of mentally healthy workplaces, using a framework developed by our partners at the Business Leaders’ Health and Safety Forum.

## Growing awareness and understanding

We’ve started our movement for change by asking members about the processes they currently have for managing mental health and wellbeing in the workplace, so we can build a picture of our areas of collective strength and opportunity. We’ll validate the information through a series of “deep-dive” focus groups with members from a range of different sized businesses. This information will enable us to identify areas we can most effectively target our efforts to grow members’ capabilities in this area.

## Challenges and opportunities

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We are pleased to share the findings of our initial survey in this report.

What the results tell us is that many of our member firms are already doing good work in supporting mental health and wellbeing in the workplace, and most have some tools and initiatives in place aimed at minimising risks to the mental health and wellbeing of their employees. However, the majority of initiatives are aimed at supporting their people once harm has been done, rather than proactively fostering mental health and wellbeing of their people. This suggests that our most significant opportunities are for organisations to be more proactive in supporting their people to thrive.

Our deep dive focus groups will provide a clearer view of the validity of this initial finding and the scope of opportunities to grow our movement for change. We look forward to continuing to learn together and work with you towards our vision of a professional services consulting sector where all our people thrive.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Davidson', with a stylized, flowing script.

Helen Davidson, Chief Executive  
ACE New Zealand

# what we know

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## Mental health issues are common

Everyone has mental health, and mental health is everyone's concern. Experiencing a mental health problem is common. Nearly half of New Zealanders will meet the criteria for a diagnosis of mental illness at some stage in their life, and one in five will receive a mental health diagnosis in any given year.

The number of people experiencing a mental health problem is rising.

## Research shows that work can lead to a range of mental health harms

With most adults spending a significant portion of their waking lives at work, it is unsurprising this is often the setting where problems are experienced, particularly with the changing nature of our work. We no longer work 9-5, are more connected than ever, and are often expected to be available on demand, whether we are at the office or at home.

We know poor workplace design and other organisational factors such as work culture can lead to mental harm. If sustained, these can lead to mental ill-health, illness and/or physical injury.

Mental health in the workplace has become an increasingly urgent systemic issue. If we want our people and businesses to thrive, we need to start paying attention to mental health and wellbeing in the workplace.

## Mental harm is costly

Poor mental health and wellbeing is costly for individuals as well as organisations.

Poor mental health impacts organisations through staff turnover, sickness, absenteeism, and presenteeism (loss of productivity due to poor mental health). According to the 2019 New Zealand Workplace Barometer, 69.6 per cent of respondents reported absence from work in the last 12 months due to 'physical or mental health'.<sup>1</sup>



**A healthy workplace is one in which leaders and employees “collaborate to use a continual improvement process to protect and promote the health, safety and wellbeing of all workers and the sustainability of the workplace.”**

World Health Organisation, 2010

Specifically, for the professional services consulting industry recent research commissioned by the Australian Construction Industry Culture Taskforce through BIS Oxford Economics (‘September 2021) has for the first time quantified the economic impact to the industry:

“Work-related fatalities, injuries and illnesses in 2018 cost \$6.1 billion, the productivity cost of employees consistently working overtime was \$708 million, mental ill-health cost \$643 million and the estimated costs of construction worker suicides were \$533 million.”<sup>2</sup>

## **Building a mentally healthy workplace is a legal requirement**

Employers have a responsibility to ensure their people are working in mentally safe work environments, and that they are taking action to reduce mental health risks in the workplace. The Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 requires organisations to manage risks to workers, including their mental health and wellbeing.

## **Building a mentally healthy workplace benefits individuals, organisations and society**

Businesses that invest in building and maintaining good mental health and wellbeing of their employees report higher productivity, sales and customer satisfaction.<sup>3</sup>

Research commissioned by Xero and conducted by the New Zealand Institute of Economic Research shows investing in employee wellbeing makes a business more profitable, in that for every dollar a small business owner invests in company-wide wellbeing initiatives for their staff, they can expect to see a return of up to 12 times within a year.<sup>4</sup>

When people are healthy, they can reach their full potential, are more creative, innovative and solutions-focussed, and are less likely to take time off, suffer injuries, or leave for another job or leave the profession/sector.<sup>5</sup>

Workplaces that are known as a good place to work also find it easier to recruit and retain the best workers.

# what we don't know

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**"Mental wellbeing is not a matter of luck but a matter of design. It requires a deliberate effort to control psychological risks and build in the proactive factors associated with 'good work'."**

Dr Hillary Bennett, organisational psychologist, Leading Safety

We know we have a legal obligation and a moral and business imperative to ensure mental safety at work. What we don't know is how well we are doing as a professional services consulting sector in this space.

Anecdotally, our members are telling us this is an issue that challenges them, and that mental health is a key risk on their organisational risk registers. But we don't have data on how well we're doing as employers and businesses – are we investing in the right areas and initiatives? Are we measuring in the right way? What impacts are we having?

ACE New Zealand has set out to better understand workplace design for mental health in professional services consulting, so we can provide our members with targeted support and direction for their business development in this area, with **the ultimate goal of a professional services consulting sector where our peoples' mental health flourishes. This means a professional services consulting sector renowned for its care and attention to the mental health and wellbeing of its people, a sector where every consultant feels mentally safe in their workplace, and a sector that attracts new talent because they know they can bring their whole self to work and their mental health will be prioritised.**

# framework for managing mental wellbeing at work

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## What does good mental health workplace design look like?

ACE New Zealand has started its journey by identifying a framework we can help our members use to design and benchmark their progress in the design of mentally healthy workplaces, and seeking to understand where and how our firms are currently doing so that we can provide targeted and impactful support to move forward.

ACE New Zealand has partnered with the Business Leaders' Health and Safety Forum which, together with organisational psychologist Dr Hillary Bennett of Leading Safety, have developed a comprehensive framework for managing mental health and wellbeing at work.

The framework offers a holistic approach to workplace design that looks beyond just reducing or eliminating risks in the workplace and providing people with help when harm has occurred, to providing people with support and building resilience to proactively protect people from harm.

The framework offers four approaches to help business leaders and their organisations make sense of what they need to do to meet their obligations to prevent mental harm at work, as well as to harness opportunities to ensure their people and businesses thrive, relevant to the New Zealand work environment. The four approaches cover the areas businesses can work in to support and protect their people affected by mental ill-health, as well as the areas businesses can proactively work in to protect and foster mental health at work.



PROTECT/FOSTER: Use **proactively** to build resilience

SUPPORT/RECLAIM: Use **reactively** once harm has occurred to restore health and wellbeing

MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM

UNWELL

STRUGGLING

GOING OK

THRIVING



Business Leaders'  
Health & Safety Forum  
ZERO HARM WORKPLACES

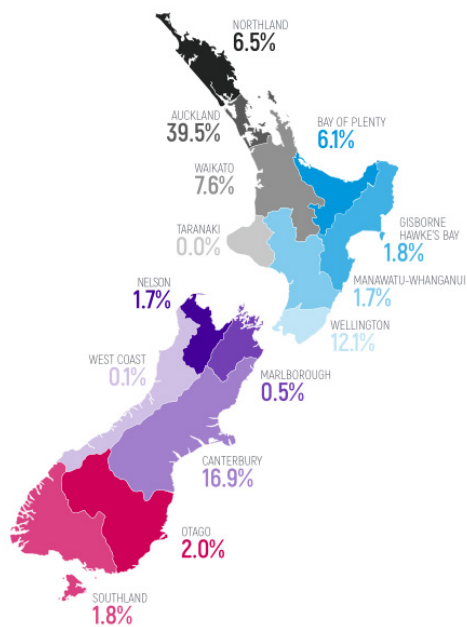
To **protect** and **foster** is to proactively build resilience.

To **reclaim** and **support** is to react once harm has occurred to restore health and wellbeing.

An effective mental health and wellbeing business plan will use all four approaches.



# survey



## About

In early 2022, ACE New Zealand surveyed its members to better understand the tools and initiatives they have in place to manage mental health and wellbeing in their workplaces, using the Forum's four approaches as the framework.

We asked members to identify the initiatives in place at their firm to protect, foster, support, and reclaim mental health in the workplace. We've used this data to identify where members are strong across those four areas, the predominant areas members are allocating their time and resources, and the gaps and opportunities we have to build more capability across our membership.

There are limitations with this data, as it is a high-level capture of initiatives and not an in-depth analysis of their effectiveness. But it gives us a starting point for more in-depth action, and we'll talk more about our next steps at the end of this report.

## Participation

**142** member organisations completed the survey, representing 11,912 employees.

Responding organisations were predominately located in the North Island, with the greatest representation from Auckland.



PROTECT

# protect

Only a few organisations have specific tools or strategies to monitor or assess risks.

15%

**fitness to work  
programmes**

13%

**mental health  
incident reporting**

6%

**psychological  
risk assessments**

To protect is to proactively identify and manage risks to mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. This means eliminating or minimising risk at the source where practicable and designing in protective factors. This is in line with employers' obligations under the Health and Safety at Work Act, which requires organisations to manage risks to workers, including their mental health and wellbeing.

We asked members what tools they have in place to help identify, eliminate, and/or minimise risks to mental health and wellbeing in the workplace.

66 per cent of organisations said they have health and safety policies and a health and safety representative, and 56 per cent said they have regular Health and Safety forums.

Around half of responding organisations have systems in place to help identify risks to mental health and wellbeing and proactively keep people safe such as workload assessments (49 per cent) and analysis of workplace data such as sick leave (46 per cent). The majority of organisations with more specific tools or initiatives in place were large in size, but small to medium sized organisations were more likely to have general evaluation systems such as workload assessments, or analysis of workplace data.

It is encouraging to see many organisations have some type of process or system in place to minimise risks of harm and creating a good workplace culture. However, good workplace design involves deliberately designing factors that protect the mental health and wellbeing of workers and eliminating or minimising harmful factors.

Only a few organisations have specific tools or strategies to monitor or assess risks.

15% fitness to work programmes

13% mental health incident reporting

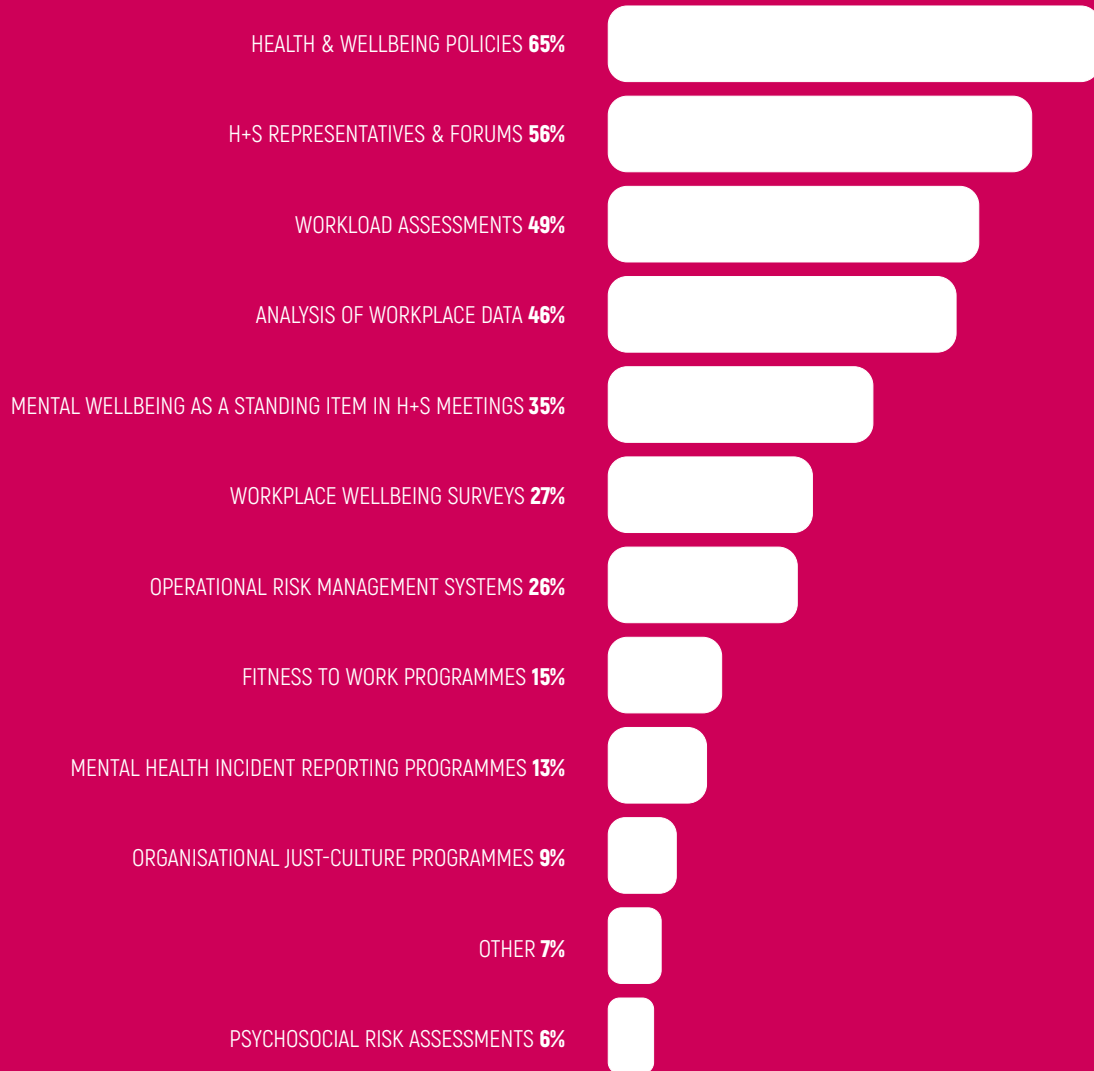
6% psychological risk assessments

Without tools to evaluate and monitor risk, it is difficult to know whether an organisation is adequately meeting its legal obligations to manage risks. The responses tell us that we have opportunities to be more proactive and develop the way we evaluate risk and use data to allow better design for mental health risk minimisation and to prioritise areas of focus.

Having a better understanding of what those risks are is also a valuable tool in being able to hold senior leaders to account for the status of mental health and wellbeing of their employees.

WHAT TOOLS DO YOU HAVE  
IN PLACE TO HELP IDENTIFY,  
ELIMINATE, AND/OR  
MINIMISE RISKS TO MENTAL  
HEALTH AND WELLBEING IN  
THE WORKPLACE?

PROTECT







FOSTER

76%

**of organisations said they  
are developing an open  
respectful culture**

61%

**of organisations said they  
had some kind of stress  
management or flexible  
working arrangements**

To foster is to develop the mental health and wellbeing capability of individuals and teams. This means proactively providing people with support and building resilience. Taking steps to foster mental health and wellbeing capability at work is important because it enables people to manage and deal with challenges as they arise, and before they cause harm.

We asked members what initiatives they have in place to develop the mental health and wellbeing of individuals and teams.

76% of organisations said they are developing an open respectful culture  
61% of organisations said they had some kind of stress management or flexible working arrangements.

These are important building blocks in developing mental health and wellbeing capability. However, only around 30 per cent of firms had more specific programmes in place such as capability building programmes, promoting positive wellbeing and physical fitness programmes, and about 20 per cent said they provided workshops, seminars, or communications from leadership focused on mental health wellbeing and awareness, and healthy workplaces. Only 22 per cent were involved in national mental health awareness initiatives.

What the data tells us is there is opportunity for organisations to develop and enhance mental health awareness and capability among employees by making specific resources, tools and support, more accessible.

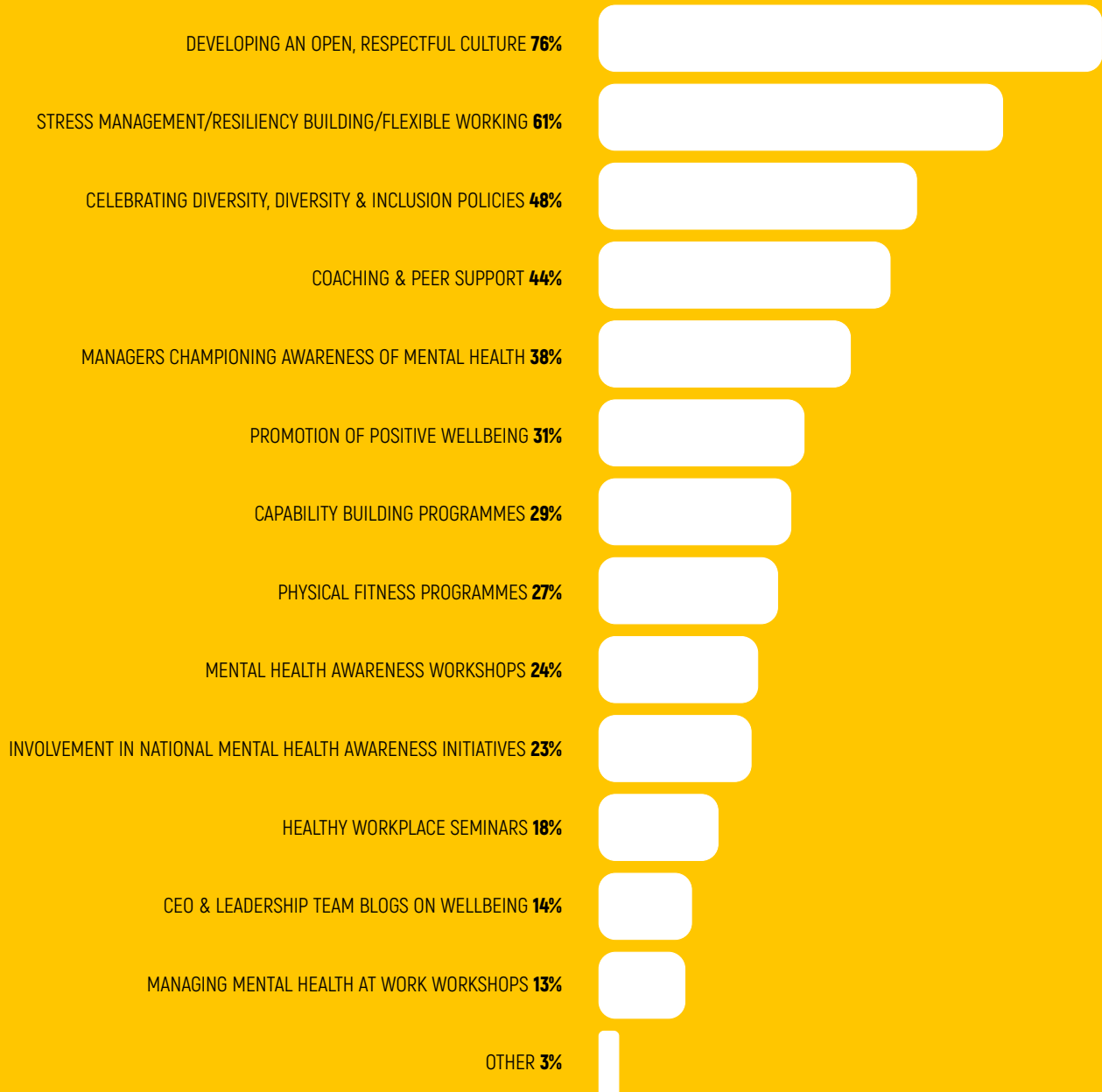
Under 50 per cent of firms had diversity and inclusion policies or coaching and peer support. There is an opportunity to commit to promoting inclusion and diversity and introduce activities that challenge stigma.

We know for cultural change to happen it must be driven from the leadership level. There is also an opportunity for Boards and senior leaders to champion mental health and wellbeing in their workplaces, and to make mental health wellbeing more visible.



WHAT INITIATIVES DO YOU  
HAVE IN PLACE TO  
DEVELOP THE MENTAL  
HEALTH AND WELLBEING  
OF INDIVIDUALS AND  
TEAMS?

FOSTER





RECLAIM



76%

**of organisations had in place flexible working arrangements**



45%

**have coaching and peer support**

To reclaim is to restore the mental health and wellbeing of individuals. This means providing tools and resources to help manage risks and promote health and wellbeing. This is important to enable people to stay healthy and well, and to recover when harm has occurred.

We asked members what initiatives they have in place to restore the mental health and wellbeing of their people and teams.

76% of organisations had in place flexible working arrangements.

45% have coaching and peer support.

Few organisations provide access to specific workplace and clinical support programmes or have in place promotion strategies to help restore mental health and wellbeing, such as mindfulness, self-awareness, or physical fitness.

While flexible working arrangements can be helpful in promoting work-life balance they can also have the opposite effect by removing the barrier between work and home. It is therefore important to also have strategies and tools that support the way we work.

The responses tell us there is opportunity to better support employees to restore mental health and wellbeing once harm has occurred. These sit alongside the proactive approaches to minimise risks of mental harm in the workplace.

WHAT INITIATIVES DO YOU  
HAVE IN PLACE TO RESTORE  
THE MENTAL HEALTH AND  
WELLBEING OF YOUR  
PEOPLE AND TEAMS?

# RECLAIM

FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS **76%**

COACHING & PEER SUPPORT **45%**

PROMOTION OF POSITIVE WELLBEING **31%**

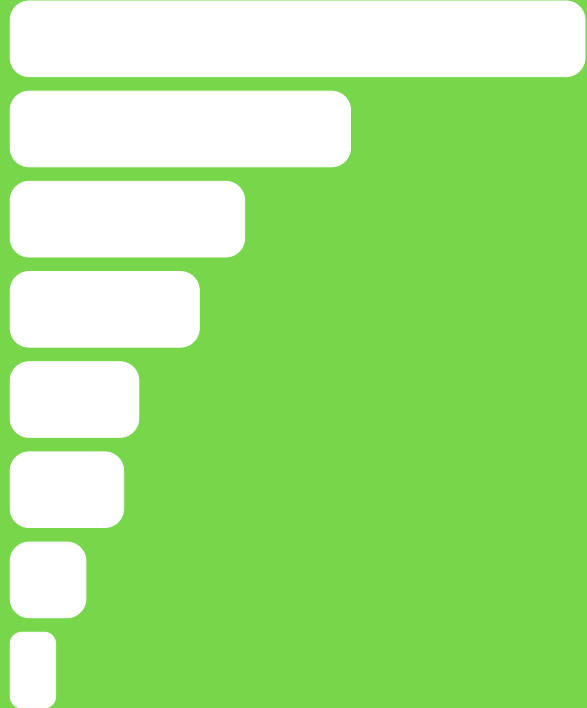
PHYSICAL FITNESS PROGRAMMES **25%**

HEALTHY WORKPLACE SEMINARS **17%**

MINDFULNESS PROGRAMMES **15%**

SELF-AWARENESS PROGRAMMES **10%**

OTHER (EG COUNSELLING, MONITORING) **6%**





A person wearing an orange long-sleeved shirt and grey athletic pants is captured mid-stride while running on a paved path. The background is a soft-focus view of trees and foliage, suggesting a park or outdoor setting. A large, semi-transparent blue diagonal shape overlays the lower right portion of the image. The word "SUPPORT" is written in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters within this blue area.

**SUPPORT**

# support

40%

peer support

43%

EAP

25%

counselling

To support is to provide access to appropriate workplace clinical support. This means providing access to programmes to address harm once it has occurred. This is an important part of an employer's obligation to support people once harm has occurred to restore health and wellbeing.

We asked members what access they provide to workplace and clinical support.

While most organisations offer workplace changes to support mental health and wellbeing, such as flexible working, role changes, and workload adjustments (76 per cent), few also had more specific programmes to support their people in place.

40% peer support

43% EAP

25% counselling

Few organisations offer more specific workplace support such as return to work programmes (21 per cent), and less than 10 per cent of organisations provide specific clinical support programmes such as rehabilitation, psychological first aid, or post traumatic incident support.

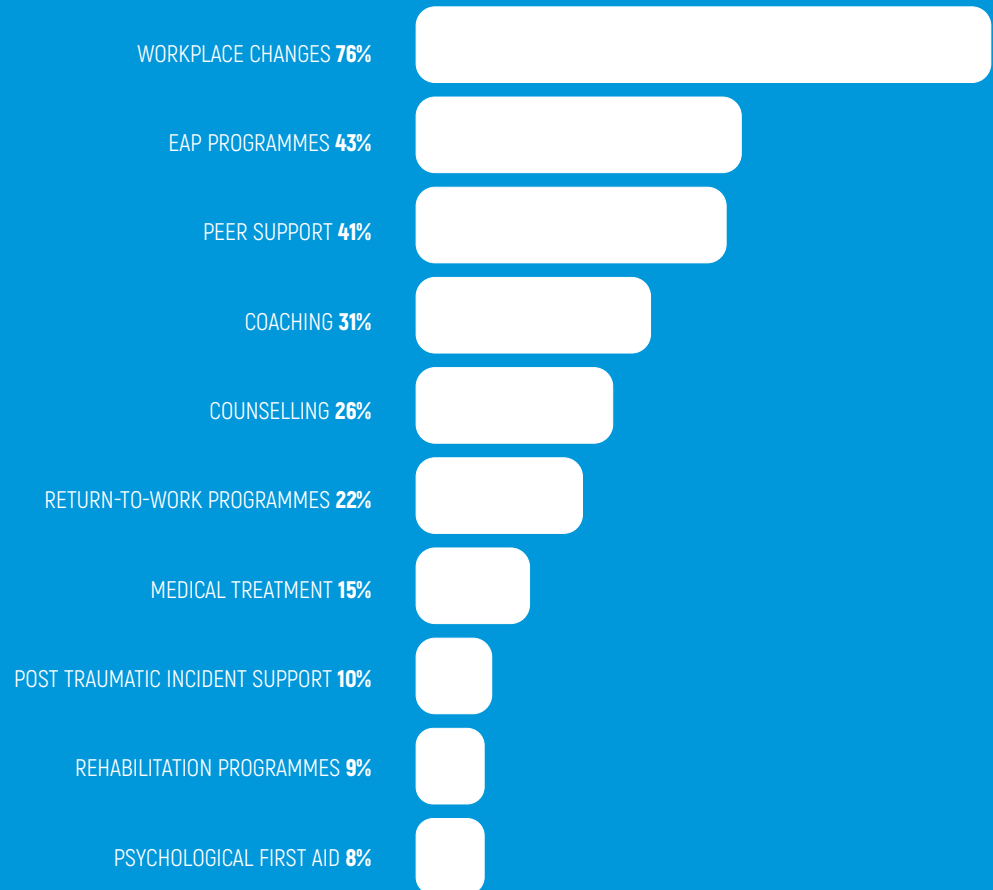
Although clinical support structures are reactionary, focused on providing help when harm has already occurred, they are an important part of an effective workplace mental health and wellbeing plan. The responses tell us there is opportunity for organisations to provide better access to workplace and clinical support.

There is opportunity to ensure both internal and external support and resources are accessible, and to consider how they are being used to better understand the risks that lead to harm. There is also opportunity to ensure that available resources are advocated for, and communicated, by senior leaders.



WHAT ACCESS DO YOU  
PROVIDE TO  
WORKPLACE AND  
CLINICAL SUPPORT?

# SUPPORT



## how are we doing?

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The survey results tell us that a lot of our businesses are already working across all four areas of workplace design. While this is good, it is not necessarily by intent. Many of the tools and initiatives businesses have in place are reactive, focussing on helping people when they have been harmed. Our collective approach to proactive initiatives is more variable.

In addition, many of the tools and initiatives currently being used are high-level approaches and would benefit from a more specific focus on the impacts work has on people and the way we work. An example of this is flexible working arrangements, which most businesses are adopting. However, without more specific programmes focussed on the way we work and assessing the impacts on individuals, it is difficult to know if flexible working is having a positive or negative effect on individuals and businesses.

Overall, the results suggest that there are clear opportunities for our businesses to better design their workplaces to support their people to thrive.

## what's next

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The next step for us is to bring together a small representation of the ACE New Zealand membership to do an in-depth mapping exercise, with expert help, looking at the status of mental health and wellbeing within their workplaces using the Forum framework. This process involves taking a deeper look at the initiatives in place, how resource is currently spread across them, and how they are perceived across the workplace in terms of effectiveness.

This exercise will help us to create a deeper representative view of where our members are putting their energy to assess what is working, and then identify gaps and opportunities for action.

Using the information gathered from the mapping exercise, and considering it alongside the data in this report, we will be able to identify where our greatest opportunities are and areas where ACE New Zealand can support its members to design mentally healthy workplaces where our professional services consultants can thrive. We will do this by:

better understanding how our professional services consulting sector are doing in this area;

growing a strong awareness of why the design of mentally healthy workplaces is important;

engaging with senior leadership to get their commitment to change;

identifying areas where ACE New Zealand can provide guidance or link members to trusted resources and experts to enable them to step up to the challenge; and

monitoring our progress

## resources

ACE New Zealand would like to thank the Business Leaders' Health and Safety Forum and Dr Hillary Bennett for their support in this process.

You can find out more about the Business Leaders' Health and Safety Forum and access their suite of resources here: [forum.org.nz](https://forum.org.nz)

## references

- 1 [https://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/fms/school\\_of\\_management/HWG/The%202020%20New%20Zealand%20Workplace%20Barometer%20Report%20FINAL.pdf?5D42AA029903C7C6B61C5F948507BCE6](https://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/fms/school_of_management/HWG/The%202020%20New%20Zealand%20Workplace%20Barometer%20Report%20FINAL.pdf?5D42AA029903C7C6B61C5F948507BCE6)
- 2 <https://www.afr.com/property/commercial/changing-culture-in-construction-would-save-8-billion-20210906-p58p9x>
- 3 ibid
- 4 <https://www.xero.com/blog/2021/03/wellbeing-boosts-bottom-line/>
- 5 In the UK, half the almost 39 million days lost to non-fatal workplace injuries/illness are because of work related stress, anxiety and depression. (HSE, 2021).

