

Measuring Workplace Wellbeing

WORKPLACE WELLBEING IN HEALTHCARE

Our people are pivotal to the effectiveness and sustainability of our healthcare system and therefore it is critical that health organisations protect and promote the wellbeing of their workforce to enable them to provide efficient, effective and high quality patient care.

CEIH's strategic approach to pursuing excellence in workplace wellbeing across the South Australian healthcare sector is underpinned by an integrated framework to healthy workplaces. This framework recognises that organisational, physical and individual factors need to simultaneously be considered and addressed to create a healthy, safe and thriving workplace.

CEIH's healthcare workforce wellbeing approach has a number of key pillars of work which aims to strengthen the system to ensure that healthcare workforce wellbeing prioritised, protected and promoted.

One of CEIH's key pillars of work is "Creating actionable data insights through wellbeing measurement".

Why measure?

"What is not defined cannot be measured. What is not measured, cannot be improved. What is not improved, is always degraded"

Lord Kelvin William Thomson

Adopting a data driven approach is a critical success factor in creating a culture of workplace wellbeing. Measuring workplace wellbeing provides value beyond generating a snapshot of an organisation's current state. It can:

- proactively assess work system factors known to impact (positively & negatively) health, wellbeing and safety;
- assist in the identification and/or development of appropriate solutions to improve workplace wellbeing;
- track and measure the impact of any implemented interventions;
- identify priority and "at risk" workgroups to mobilise improvement efforts;
- assist with compliance with Work, Health and Safety (WHS) regulations and codes of practice;
- identify opportunities to improve practice efficiencies and effectiveness;
- engage leaders and stimulate discussions about the importance of prioritising the wellbeing of healthcare workers; and
- enhance transparency and accountability for executive leaders around workplace wellbeing outcomes (similar to patient safety and clinical outcomes).

What should be measured?

There are a range of metrics and associated assessment tools available to measure different elements of workplace wellbeing. It is critical that organisations consider the following questions before undertaking any form of data collection:

- 1) What new “knowledge” am I looking for and for what purpose?
- 2) What data already exists that may help fill this gap in knowledge if analysed?
- 3) Do I require benchmarking against existing internal organisational data or the ability to replicate this data in the future?
- 4) Do I want to be able to compare how we are going against other relevant external organisations?

Types of wellbeing metrics

There are a range of metrics that can be used to measure both workplace and worker wellbeing once the purpose of the data collection has been identified.

Organisational wellbeing indicators are the systems, processes, programs, policies and environmental factors of a workplace that can positively or negatively impact wellbeing and culture. They can be measured through an organisational assessment/audit process by an appropriate person within an organisation.

Team wellbeing indicators generally relate to team-specific factors that impact on team wellbeing and performance, including local work systems and processes, interpersonal relationships and leadership behaviours. This can be measured through psychosocial risk assessment tools, staff perception surveys or focus groups to identify specific hazards and risks. Leadership behaviour and performance assessment is also a useful metric to support team wellbeing¹.

Individual wellbeing indicators relate to the health and wellbeing status of individual workers. It is usually collected by means of self-assessment relating to one or more domains of health and wellbeing (e.g. physical health, chronic disease risk/lifestyle behaviours, mental distress, burnout/fatigue, professional fulfillment, work-life integration, etc.).

Lead vs lag indicators of workplace wellbeing

Lead indicators of workplace wellbeing are evidence-based predictive and protective work-related factors that have been shown to directly correlate with worker wellbeing outcomes. **Lag** indicators are used to describe the current state and are variable over the long term.

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF EVIDENCE-BASED INDICATORS OF A HEALTHY WORKPLACE.

Lead Indicators:

- Leadership commitment
- Leadership behaviours and capability
- Dedicated resourcing
- Worker participation and consultation
- Policies, practice and procedures that support wellbeing
- Safe and health-promoting physical work environment
- Programs and service to support physical and mental health wellbeing
- Regular wellbeing communication
- Data driven measurement and evaluation

Lag Indicators:

- Absenteeism and presenteeism
- Workforce productivity
- Workplace injuries and illnesses (including reported hazards and incidents)
- Workers compensation claims
- Worker health and lifestyle behaviours (eg. smoking, nutritional habits, alcohol consumption, physical activity, sleep patterns)
- Worker physical and mental health outcomes
- Consumer feedback
- Patient experience, safety and outcomes.

¹ [Impact of Organizational Leadership on Physician Burnout and Satisfaction](#)

How can workplace wellbeing be measured?

Ideally, organisations should select validated question sets or tools shown to provide metrics correlated to the outcomes of interest. Choosing metrics with benchmarks to compare to is also beneficial.

Using existing data sources

Healthcare organisations are not short on data! The challenge lies in turning it into meaningful and actionable information. Start by pulling together all existing workforce data from your Work Health and Safety (WHS), Human Resources (HR), and Organisational Development teams. This may include reported hazards and incidents captured in your safety management system and worksite audits, as well as workers compensation claim data, sick leave, turnover rates, and results from previous culture surveys, etc. It may also be worth reviewing information regarding patient safety and quality, consumer feedback, overtime worked, performance review completion, and other sources of relevant information.

Think about how these existing data sets could 'talk' to each other to create further insights. This lag data will help highlight trends or hot spots within your organisation that may require attention. The next step is to dig deeper to identify (and address) what's causing those results and trends.

Collecting data on organisational factors to highlight causal factors and guide action planning

There are a few ways you can collect data on the lead indicators of workplace wellbeing. There is currently no consistent assessment or standards for workplace wellbeing being used across the health care sector in South Australia or SA Health.

- Organisational assessment tools or audits are useful for measuring against evidence-based indicators and guide action planning against identified gaps. An example is the new South Australian Healthy Workplace Check² which is free, validated, easy to use, and provides your organisation with a score to help with benchmarking and guiding action.
- Staff perception surveys such as culture or psychosocial risk assessment tools, can be completed by the workforce at a regular cadence (e.g. IWorkForSA Your Voice Survey; and the People at Work psychosocial risk assessment³ which is free and endorsed by SafeWork SA)

Collecting data on individual worker wellbeing to benchmark and track change

A number of different wellbeing metrics are currently being used across the health system to gauge workforce wellbeing and/or support individuals identify and improve in their own wellbeing. There is currently no consistent measure of worker wellbeing being used across the health care sector in South Australia or across SA Health.

- Most individual wellbeing assessment tools on the market will focus in on one domain of wellbeing, e.g. mental wellbeing, burnout, fatigue, professional fulfillment, or healthy lifestyle behaviours. Consider if it will meet your specific needs.
- Individual wellbeing data may be useful to set benchmarks and track changes over time. It may also be useful to assist in tailor health promotion efforts to meet staff needs.
- The tool or question set used will depend on the purpose for collecting the data. Consider the feasibility of embedding wellbeing questions into existing data collection methods or workforce surveys. This can help reduce 'survey fatigue' and increase response rates.
- Aim to use a validated and evidence-based set of questions correlated to your outcome of interest.
- To increase response rates and value for workers, choose a tool that provides relevant and credible information back to respondents to help them build their own knowledge and skills to manage their own wellbeing. This can sometimes be a tricky balance as not all data collection methods allow for this.

² [Healthy Workplace Check](#) [live December 2022]

³ peopleatwork.gov.au

Before you choose and invest in a wellbeing tool or app that is focused on individual wellbeing, check that this is a resource that workers actually want and will use, otherwise your engagement rate may be low and thus the data may not be sufficient to inform future action.

Some suggested criteria for assessing whether a wellbeing data collection tool is fit for purpose

- Does the tool measure individual wellbeing data, organisational factors or both?
- Are the questions evidence-based and validated?
- Does the tool/metrics focus on all elements of individual or organisational wellbeing or just one (e.g. just mental health)
- How often does it need to be completed by staff/teams/the organisation?
- Does it provide organisational and team level reports?
- Does it allow for benchmarking against other organisations?
- Does it provide credible and relevant strategies back to the individual or organisation in response to survey results?
- Does it provide a platform for individuals/the organisation to monitor progress?
- What is the set up and ongoing financial investment?

Challenges with wellbeing measurement

Picking an appropriate tool or platform to collect data.

Solution: It can get confusing (and costly!) with so many tools and digital apps on the market that claim to measure wellbeing. For a list of criteria of what to look out for when assessing your options, refer to our handy list in the blue breakout box.

Do not overlook the option of selecting key validated questions and inserting these into an existing organisational data collection method – this will be lower cost, lower administrative burden and will significantly improve your response rates and sustainability of collecting the information.

Low participation rates, so therefore data is not representative of the workforce as a whole

Solution: Be very clear about the purpose of the survey and make sure you communicate this widely and often. Start by consulting with the workforce about potential barriers to engagement with the survey/tool and put strategies in place to mitigate these. (E.g. staff who don't have access to computers; concerns around confidentiality, etc.). Leadership visible commitment is critical here. It's important that wellbeing measurement is an organisational commitment and not done adhoc but collected routinely and over the long term to gain important trend data.

A communication strategy to regularly update the workforce on completion rates and preliminary survey results is another possible solution. It is important that final results and actions are also communicated back to the workforce which may prompt better response rates at follow up points.

Staff feel over-surveyed and comment that “we’ve already told you before, and nothing has changed”

Solution: Start by mapping out what organisational (and divisional) surveys are conducted each year and check for duplication, timing, purpose and how they are communicated to the workforce. As mentioned, consider whether wellbeing questions can be added into existing data collection methods to reduce responder burden. Have a plan to communicate regularly about WHY you are asking the questions you are and make sure you take action with what you've learnt. Keep your workforce in the loop about the survey results and ongoing action plans.

Lack of consistent wellbeing data benchmarks across the healthcare system

It would be advantageous to the healthcare system in South Australia if consistent and validated workplace and worker wellbeing metrics were adopted by healthcare organisations to enable benchmarking and tracking of progress across our state. There are a number of freely available organisational assessment tools that may assist with this (eg. South Australian Healthy Workplace Check⁴).

Knowing what to do with the data once you have it

Turning data into actionable insights is critical. By analysing existing, organisational and individual data sources, you can:

- identify the current state of workplace and worker wellbeing within your organisation;
- identify trends, set goals and benchmarks;
- highlight hotspots such as teams or work factors needing attention (e.g. workload, leadership capability, role clarity, etc.);
- provide feedback to the workforce about current strengths and areas for improvement;
- enable clear and tailored action planning for teams and the organisation; and
- work with teams to prioritise and co-design solutions to the work-related factors that are causing daily frustrations, practice inefficiencies and ultimately poor wellbeing outcomes.

Additional resources

- [Commission on Excellence and Innovation in Health](#)
- [South Australian Healthy Workplace Check and Toolkit | Collaborative Partnership for Workplace Health and Wellbeing in SA](#)
- [Mental health | Safe Work Australia](#)
- [Measuring Mentally Healthy Workplaces Guide \(National Workplace Initiative\)](#)
- [Healthy workers & workplaces | SafeWork SA](#)
- [Mentally Healthy Workplaces Toolkit \(Office of the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment\)](#)

⁴ [Healthyworkplaces.sa.gov.au; Healthy Workplace Check](https://healthyworkplaces.sa.gov.au/Healthy-Workplace-Check)