

Southern Cross Health Society

Emerging Diversity and Inclusion

Empowering employees to take care of their mental wellbeing is ensuring Southern Cross Health Society's workforce has the resilience it needs to cope with changes in the pace and way it does business.

Southern Cross Health Society is one of New Zealand's best-known health insurers. The not-for-profit organisation has 860,000 members and more than 600 employees around the country.

It launched its Hand-in-hand programme after the organisation's first Diversity & Inclusion Survey showed that more than two thirds of employees considered mental wellbeing as the most important issue for the business to focus on.



To start the programme, Umbrella Ltd, a team of clinical psychologists and workplace mental wellbeing experts brought in to support the work, ran a staff wellbeing assessment. Most of the 71 per cent of staff who responded showed robust mental resilience however some were identified as 'at risk' and were offered professional support.

The survey also showed that people working in the Contact Centre and Healthcare Partnerships teams were often emotionally challenged by the consequences of medical conversations, and they were offered bespoke Strengthening Resilience workshops.

Everyone who responded to the survey was given a personalised report of their mental wellbeing, and aggregated anonymous results went to Southern Cross Health Society's Leadership Team and People & Strategy Team and then were summarised back to the business.

Some of the other initiatives launched as part of Hand-in-hand include:

- Mental Health Awareness and Managing Mental Health workshops for 120 people leaders
- Professional support for those in need via consultations with clinical psychologists or through the Employee Assistance Programme. This is available to employees and their whanau
- Subsidised access to meditation and mindfulness app Headspace
- On-site seminars offered during work hours on mental wellbeing topics.

The Leadership Team regularly promotes the initiative in business updates to staff and were the first to take part in the workshops to upskill managers.

Southern Cross Health Society was able to identify 15 at-risk employees as part of the wellbeing assessment. These people were contacted confidentially by Umbrella Ltd to ensure they had a good support network around them and offered help if needed.

The workplace is also benefitting, says Chief People & Strategy Officer Vicki Caisley, because more people are asking for help. In the past year, 19 per cent of employees have used the Employee Assistance Programme (the national average is eight per cent).

"To us, that's 108 employees and seven family members on their way to greater mental wellbeing."

Umbrella's survey report said, "Southern Cross is representative of New Zealand with the levels of people who are languishing, but it's more visible here due to the society creating a culture where it's alright to ask for help." Pre and post workshop evaluations showed people leaders reported a 25 per cent increase in their knowledge of, confidence to talk about and ability to promote and protect mental health.

"I'm ecstatic that we've pushed into a space where we can make an authentic difference to our people's lives," says Vicki Caisley. "If we can contribute to and enhance our people's mental wellbeing, then I can't think of a single reason why we wouldn't. It enriches their lives and reinforces their ability to perform at their best."



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