



NEW DATA: Support from friends and family crucial to health workers' wellbeing

New research from Mental Health Australia reveals how healthcare professionals depend on support from friends and family during the COVID-19 pandemic

- **Over 70% of healthcare workers said COVID-19 restrictions have impacted their mental health and wellbeing in a negative way.**
- **During the last six months, 26% have reached out to a trusted friend or family member for mental health support and help.**
- **54% believe their friends and family have been extremely supportive.**
- **Healthcare professionals offer their top tips for managing your mental health ahead of World Mental Health Day.**

To mark World Mental Health Day on October 10th, national peak body Mental Health Australia, has released survey results on the mental health and wellbeing of healthcare professionals across the country.

The research looks at how the pandemic has affected healthcare professionals on a personal level, and what strategies they have used to maintain mental health and wellbeing over the past six months.

Over 70% of healthcare professionals stated that COVID-19 restrictions have impacted their mental health and wellbeing in a negative way. 4 out of 5 say that working in healthcare during the pandemic has increased the amount of stress and pressure they experience in the workplace.

According to the research, a social support network of family and friends has had a positive effect on healthcare professionals. Over half (54%) of survey respondents believe their friends and family have been extremely supportive, and 26% have reached out to a trusted friend or family member for mental health support and help.



Commenting on the research results Dr Leanne Beagley, CEO of Mental Health Australia, said;

“The research results highlight the importance of staying connected with the people in our lives during these difficult times. When we think about healthcare professionals, we mistakenly believe that because they are in the health sector they must be looking after themselves. It’s a common misconception, but the truth is they need our support now more than ever. This is something we need to keep in mind on World Mental Health Day this year.”

Of the 255 survey respondents who work in the healthcare industry, 67% say that working in the healthcare industry during the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative effect on home life. Almost half (49%) have not sought specific mental health support, but there were a variety of activities respondents took part in to maintain good mental health.

Exercising outdoors (52%), cooking more and eating well (40%), spending more time with family and friends (37%), taking part in at least one recreational activity per week (34%), learning a new skill (22%) and downloading a mental health app (18%) are just some of the ways healthcare professionals have been managing their mental health and wellbeing over the past six months.

Melbourne based pharmacist, Ms Helen Lowy, is Chair of the Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia’s Mental Health Leadership Committee. She shared her personal experience of working during the pandemic;

“I have noticed that my emotions shift from day to day. They have included anxiety about adjusting to rapidly changing priorities, stress associated with problem solving in an environment of uncertainty, and grief associated with working in different teams.

Approaches that have helped me shift from surviving to thriving include, acknowledging that these responses are a normal reaction to the perceived threats of the coronavirus pandemic and recognising that these feelings will pass. I choose carefully what I focus on, minimising exposure to social media and instead focus on facts, information and what is within my sphere of influence. I pay particular attention to how I eat, play and sleep. For example, creating healthy meals with my son during home schooling, walking our Westies daily and switching off from responding to emails well before bedtime.”

Dr Beagley said; *“Technology has played a vital role in keeping us together while staying apart and it is great to see so many of us are utilising these functions to stay connected. If you have a person in your life working in the healthcare industry at the moment, take time this World Mental Health Day to reach out to them and make sure they are doing OK. They could seem like the most resilient person you know but they need your support and compassion just as much as the rest of us.”*

When asked about the specific mental health impacts, 70% cited experiencing prolonged tiredness and fatigue, 57% now have problems getting to sleep or staying asleep, and 42% have been experiencing mood swings or find themselves over-reacting when faced with minor issues. Some additional strategies respondents use to beat the COVID-19 blues included spending time with pets, giving themselves a break from social media and the news, taking sick days as needed, sticking to a routine, taking nutritional supplements and reducing their alcohol intake.

Commenting on the research results RACGP spokesperson, Dr Billy Stoupas said; *“I hope these survey results act as a reminder for health workers to check in with themselves and take care of their wellbeing – and know that help is there for you if you need it, you can reach out to colleagues, loved ones, and support services.*



While the COVID-19 pandemic has made this year particularly challenging for GPs and other health workers on the frontline, we know mental health stigma persists in our profession. We need to keep fighting this and embrace the fact that we are human and sometimes we need help, and that's perfectly okay. I would also encourage every healthcare worker to use World Mental Health Day as a reminder to seek out a regular GP who can provide ongoing support and work with you to manage your physical, mental and emotional health. Taking care of our own health ultimately better equips us to safely care for others."

For more information on World Mental Health Day visit www.lookafteryourmentalhealthaustralia.org.au

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Talent available for interview upon request:

Dr Leanne Beagley, CEO of Mental Health Australia
RACGP spokesperson, Dr Billy Stoupas
Melbourne based pharmacists, Ms Helen Lowy, Chair of the SHPA Mental Health Leadership Committee.
Ms Dimtra Tsucalas and Ms Khanh Nguyen.
Canberra based community pharmacist Ms Elise Apolloni.

World Mental Health Day

World Mental Health Day is a day for global mental health education, awareness and advocacy. The campaign theme for 2020 is "Look after your mental health, Australia" and the aim is to reduce stigma, foster connectivity and promote help seeking behaviour.

The World Mental Health Day campaign is an awareness campaign and does not provide specific mental health services.

If you need help now or at any time please call one of the phone numbers below which are available for support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week:

Emergency services – 000

Lifeline – 13 11 14

Beyond Blue – 1300 22 4636

Suicide Call Back Service – 1300 659 467

Kids Helpline – 1800 55 1800

MensLine - 1300 789 978

Specific support is also available to you through the following avenues.

Nurse and Midwife Support <https://www.nmsupport.org.au/> 1800 667 877

Dental Practitioner Support <https://www.dpsupport.org.au/> 1800 377 700

Pharmacists' Support Service www.supportforpharmacists.org.au 1300244910

Drs4Drs- <https://www.drs4drs.com.au/getting-help/>

Mental Health Australia

Mental Health Australia is the peak, national non-government organisation representing and promoting the interests of the Australian mental health sector and committed to achieving better mental health for all Australians. Mental Health Australia aims to promote mentally healthy communities, educate Australians on mental health issues, influence mental health reform so that government policies address all contemporary mental health issues, conduct research on mental health issues, and carry out regular consultation to represent the best interests of our members, partners and the community. <https://lookafteryourmentalhealthaustralia.org.au/>

Research: This research was conducted through Survey Monkey and included a sample of 255 Australian men and women working in the healthcare industry during the COVID-19 pandemic.

