



**EVERYBODY BENEFITS:** EMPLOYER GUIDE

# Creating headspace

A workplace mental health blueprint



# Why mental health matters more than ever

In today's world, where workplace mental health has never been more critical - or more complex - employers face the pressing challenge of creating environments where employees can truly thrive.

To address this, Everywhen and Simplyhealth hosted an exclusive event - **Creating Headspace: A meeting of minds on mental health & wellbeing in the workplace**.

This intimate gathering brought together HR professionals, mental health advocates and workplace wellbeing specialists to explore innovative strategies for fostering healthier, more supportive work environments.

Through personal stories, expert insights and collaborative discussions, the event became a hub for impactful dialogue and actionable solutions.

This guide captures the key themes, strategies and takeaways from the event, offering a valuable resource to help employers build safe, inclusive and supportive workplaces.

Designed to turn conversation into meaningful action, it equips leaders with practical frameworks and inspiration to help empower employees to prioritise their mental health.

From moving personal accounts to evidence-based approaches, the insights shared aim to bridge the gap between intention and impactful workplace practices.





# Personal narratives and strategies for mental health

Personal stories have a unique ability to inspire empathy, foster understanding and drive meaningful action.

**Gemma Oaten**, actress and CEO of eating disorder support service SEED, shared her journey through an eating disorder, emphasising the need for early intervention and kindness.

"An eating disorder is not about food, it's a mental illness," said Gemma, reflecting on her experience.

Gemma's story underscored the importance of empathy and creating environments where individuals feel supported.

**Clare Kenny**, a wellbeing thought leader and TEDx speaker, spoke candidly about her battle with addiction.

She highlighted the importance of creating psychologically safe spaces

where employees can share their challenges openly and feel heard without fear of judgement.

Clare also emphasised the need to address workplace cultural and workload issues to create lasting change and alleviate stressors.

**Dr David Crepaz-Keay**, Head of Research and Applied Learning at the Mental Health Foundation, introduced a practical framework to facilitate mental health conversations.

His four-step model – Triggers, Indicators, Tactics and Strategies – provides a structured approach for identifying and managing mental health challenges effectively.

David shared real-world examples from his extensive experience, such as recognising seasonal pressures or addressing workplace dynamics that impact wellbeing.

**Debra Clark**, Head of Wellbeing at Everywhen, offered insights into the growing recognition of wellbeing as a critical component of organisational success.

She cautioned against “wellbeing washing,” where organisations outwardly promote wellbeing initiatives but fail to embed them meaningfully into their culture and day-to-day operations.

“Wellbeing is not something that can be achieved with a quick fix or tick-box approach,” she noted. “It needs to be woven into the fabric of an organisation, ensuring that employees feel genuinely supported in their physical, emotional and mental health.”

Debra highlighted the role of employer-sponsored initiatives in supporting holistic health, pointing to personalised and flexible benefits that address the physical, emotional, financial and social wellbeing needs of diverse workforces.

**Clare Gray**, Partnerships’ Lead at Simplyhealth, highlighted the importance of fostering a cultural shift within organisations to ensure wellbeing becomes an integral part of their values and practices.

She explained that “employers must move beyond isolated initiatives and cultivate environments where wellbeing is deeply embedded in the organisational culture”.

Clare also emphasised the need to stop just focusing on medicalising wellbeing and instead consider humanising it – ensuring that employees feel genuinely understood and supported as individuals.

These narratives illustrated how our experiences can foster understanding, reduce stigma and inspire change within organisations.

*“Wellbeing is not something that can be achieved with a quick fix or tick-box approach.”*





# Creating cultures of safety and support

The event's round table discussions underscored actionable themes for employers:

- **The role of leadership:** Transparent and empathetic leaders set the tone for open conversations, making employees feel supported and valued. Role modelling behaviours, such as prioritising self-care and respecting boundaries, was highlighted as essential. However, it was also acknowledged that HR professionals and middle managers often face unique challenges, as they are tasked with balancing the organisation's objectives with the needs and challenges of their teams. Providing these key individuals with the support and resources they need is crucial for fostering a culture of wellbeing throughout the organisation.
- **Proactive vs reactive strategies:** Shift from a reliance solely on reactive measures, such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), to incorporate preventative strategies, such as embedding mental health discussions into team meetings and training managers to identify early warning signs.
- **Tailoring wellbeing initiatives:** Generic wellbeing programs often fail to address individual needs. Personalised approaches – diverse resources, mental health champions and influencers, and inclusive environments – help employees feel safe discussing challenges, such as neurodivergence or personal loss.
- **Building resilience without overburdening:** Building resilience must go hand-in-hand with structural changes that support sustainable working conditions. Avoid framing resilience as a solution to unsustainable workloads.

# From awareness to action: practical frameworks

Dr David Crepaz-Keay's 'four-step model' offers a practical framework for addressing mental health challenges in a proactive and structured manner.

This model not only empowers individuals to enhance their emotional awareness and intelligence by recognising triggers and indicators and knowing the tactics and strategies they can use, but also equips managers to better support their teams.

By breaking down mental health challenges into manageable components, the framework enables managers to work collaboratively with individuals who may be struggling, fostering a supportive and understanding workplace environment:

- **Triggers:** Recognise situations that may negatively impact mental health, such as excessive workload or personal loss.
- **Indicators:** Identify early warning signs among employees, including behavioural changes, such as withdrawal.

- **Tactics:** Develop immediate steps to manage challenges effectively, such as providing additional support or promoting breaks.
- **Strategies:** Build long-term initiatives to address root causes, such as embedding flexibility into workplace policies or creating sustained wellbeing programs.

This framework helps employers develop both short-term and long-term solutions that integrate mental health considerations into their organisational strategies.

*“This framework helps employers develop both short-term and long-term solutions.”*



# Strategies for fostering a supportive workplace

The event provided insights and strategies for addressing mental health in the workplace.

Here are six actionable takeaways informed by the discussions:

1

## Practical frameworks

Employers can apply Dr David Crepaz-Keay's model by recognising triggers and indicators of mental health challenges in their workplaces.

For example, identify seasonal pressures or changes in team dynamics, and proactively ensure support across all four pillars of wellbeing – physical, emotional, financial, and social.

This includes implementing short-term mechanisms such as peer mentorship and developing long-term strategies like enhanced wellbeing policies to support employees before issues arise.

2

## Facilitating conversations

Clare Kenny emphasised the importance of psychologically safe environments for mental health discussions.

Leaders can normalise these conversations by incorporating them into team meetings and one-to-ones. Structured approaches, such as using the four-step model, guide meaningful dialogue.

Empathetic listening and open communication help build trust and foster understanding.

3

## Empowering leadership

Leadership training should equip managers to identify and address mental health challenges effectively.

Clare Kenny highlighted the value of leaders acting as role models by prioritising their own wellbeing, rather than being perceived as blockers who discourage employees from following wellbeing policies due to cultural or managerial pressures.

Providing tools and resources to leaders ensures a consistent, proactive and supportive approach to mental health.



# 4

## Engagement through storytelling

Personal stories, such as those shared by Gemma Oaten, reduce stigma and humanise mental health issues.

Incorporating these narratives into internal communications and wellbeing programs fosters empathy, encourages open discussions across teams, sends a clear signal that it's "okay to not be okay" and reassures employees that others face similar challenges.

By sharing these stories, organisations demonstrate that challenges are acknowledged and supported, rather than punished.

# 5

## Tailored wellbeing initiatives

Organisations should create initiatives tailored to the unique needs of their workforce.

This might include flexible working arrangements for parents, support groups for neurodivergent employees and targeted resources for stress management, tailored to the specific needs and capacity of each organisation.

Mental health champions can play a vital role in connecting employees with relevant resources, especially when they are proactive in their advocacy and serve as genuine influencers within their organisation.

# 6

## Proactive support mechanisms

Supportive return-to-work policies and clear communication about available resources help employees reintegrate after mental health-related absences.

For instance, awareness campaigns can highlight tools such as EAPs, virtual GP services and other resources embedded within existing employee benefits, ensuring employees are aware of all the support available.



# Action stations: leading the way in mental wellbeing

Workplace wellbeing is not a box-ticking exercise but a shared responsibility with profound benefits. Beyond boosting employee engagement, productivity, and satisfaction, it contributes to a healthier, more cohesive workplace culture – even when the ROI isn't easily quantified in monetary terms.

By fostering safe spaces, prioritising empathy and addressing cultural challenges,

employers can create environments where everyone thrives.

Everywhen and Simplyhealth are proud to support organisations in championing workplace mental health.

Together we can all take steps towards creating environments where mental health is valued and everyone feels supported.

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