

WHY EMPLOYERS NEED TO SPEAK OUT ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

IN THE WAKE OF THE MENTAL HEALTH ENQUIRY, SODEXO AUSTRALIA CEO **JOHNPAUL DIMECH** DISCUSSES FIFO HEALTH.

Despite recent media attention focusing on the unique challenges associated with a FIFO lifestyle, mental health issues and their impact are similar across most Australian communities.

According to beyondblue CEO Georgie Harman, more than one quarter of Australian workers experience stress or anxiety as a result of their working arrangements, making the workplace an important place to tackle depression and anxiety.

In any one year, three million Australians will experience depression or anxiety, and nearly half of all Australians will experience a mental health issue in their lifetime.

In Western Australia, about 80 per cent of the workforce is employed on a FIFO roster. This reflects the unique nature of the resource industry, where activities take place offshore and where mines and accommodation villages can be hundreds of kilometres away from the nearest town. FIFO has been the backbone of the industry for decades, and without it, the resource industry

would not have the people to operate. Similarly, many employees choose the FIFO lifestyle for the work/life balance and other benefits it allows. For a parent, this could mean extended periods at home, doing school drop offs and helping their children with homework. Many others use their rostered time off to go on overseas holidays or dedicate time to a special interest at home. However there are challenges that face some FIFO employees such as remote and challenging working conditions, lengthy periods away from family and friends, and re-entry into a family routine that has adapted to their absence. While it is important to acknowledge that depression, anxiety and substance abuse issues can be amplified by the FIFO lifestyle, these are issues we see in all segments of society and that is why Sodexo has initiated our mental health and wellbeing program across our entire business. We welcome the recent inquiry into the mental health of Australian FIFO workers and recognise it helps expand the discussion on the important issue. We now need a united government, industry and community response.



As a provider in Quality of Life services, we are working to ensure there is increased understanding of mental health issues within our workplace and a supportive environment where people can seek help.

The good news is that like Sodexo, other companies, particularly those of national resource industry employer group AMMA, have launched their own mental health awareness campaigns which we believe is an important element of the long-term, successful future of Australia's mining and energy industries.

Sodexo has been working on an integrated approach to tackle mental health issues by working with expert organisations in the mental health space, including Lifeline, beyondblue and our Employee Assistance Program provider.

On World Suicide Prevention Day, in September last year, we launched our I Hear You initiative, to bring mental health to front of mind within our organisation. The tagline for this initiative is: 'Know you can be heard. Believe you will be listened to.' The campaign is aimed at ensuring meaningful and immediate support is available to our employees, their friends and families across Australia.

The idea for I Hear You came from one of our site managers in Queensland who has been personally impacted by suicide and highlighted to us the importance of implementing an overarching mental health strategy.

The national campaign rollout has included team meetings at office and site level, team building events and the distribution of resources to raise awareness and highlight support services available to our employees. We are currently conducting the I Hear You survey across the business, where

employees can share their views and areas of importance in a confidential and anonymous manner.

In addition, we are educating our employees to be aware of changes in behaviour that might indicate a problem, to know how to have a conversation and where to direct their workmates, family and friends for support. We are also encouraging people to seek help for mental health issues, just as they would if they sustained a physical injury.

We are providing further training for selected employees to develop skills and empower them to help their colleagues who may be experiencing mental health challenges. Mental illness often goes undetected and we want to ensure that people are not left to suffer in silence.

In May, our organisation joined with companies such as BHP Billiton, Rio Tinto to support beyondblue's national roadshow to the Pilbara, which engaged with workers in remote communities to learn ways of decreasing the risks of developing and reducing the impact of mental health conditions. The 23 day journey saw beyondblue meet with people at 52 events across remote sites, including several at villages run by Sodexo, as well as at schools and activities within the communities.

We know that it will take a considered and committed approach to embed this initiative and start to dispel stigmas around mental health. We're excited by the traction that we've gained from I Hear You so far and are looking forward to working with other companies and industry bodies in the future to promote a healthier and more engaged workforce and to improve the Quality of Life of employees, our customers and the communities in which we operate.



A CONVERSATION IS NEEDED AMONGST WORKERS