

Media Release

legalsuper partners with leading mental health organisation

SANE Australia to provide crucial support services for the legal community

Australia's largest super fund for the legal community, legalsuper, has today announced it is partnering with national mental health charity SANE Australia's Mindful Employer program to deliver innovative programs that improve the lives of members of the legal community experiencing mental health issues.

The partnership will involve the joint creation of a series of workplace programs offering support, education and training including work-place staff presentations and online resources such as videos and podcasts. The program will be available to all members with a particular focus on members in support and administration roles.

legalsuper Chief Executive Andrew Proebstl believes the partnership, a first of its kind for administration and support staff in the legal community, will make a significant difference in the lives of many within the legal community.

"The partnership with SANE will help tackle increasingly common workplace issues such as anxiety and depression by creating a better understanding of mental illness and breaking down the stigma around mental health issues in the workplace," he said.

"Mental health support needs to be better recognised as an integral aspect of workplace health and safety. Statistically, 45% of employees will experience mental health issues in the workplace in their lifetime and from SANE's own research, nearly half of those who take leave due to depression will not disclose the real reason to their employer in fear of putting their job at risk. On occasions legal firms can be stressful workplaces and effective support mechanisms must be in place to identify and address these issues.

"Through collaboration with SANE, one of the country's leading charities helping all Australians affected by mental illness lead a better life, and a founding member of The Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance, we can offer our members the benefit of lived experience, tailored specifically for the legal community. The initiatives we implement will be designed to complement what the various law societies and employers in the legal community are already doing to help their staff thereby adding further resources to support people with mental health issues at work."

The announcement follows a study of legalsuper's membership conducted by EY Sweeney, which showed 74% of members would support legalsuper sponsoring a workplace mental health program.

"We asked our members and they told us resoundingly that they want this," Mr Proebstl added.

"The program aligns with our values of supporting the legal community. We believe that as a community we have a responsibility to care for one another, and those experiencing mental health issues have the greatest need for assistance."

Research by Beaton Consulting has found that people working in the legal profession have the highest incidence of depressive symptoms of any profession. Of 7,500 employees surveyed across Australia, 16% of respondents from the legal profession indicated that they have experienced moderate or severe depressive symptoms.

SANE CEO Jack Heath said that the partnership will help identify and address cases of stress and mental health conditions in the workplace, bringing substantial benefit to the legal community as a whole.

“The core principle underpinning the better workplace mental health training and education programs we offer for managers and staff as part of our Mindful Employer program is to put the employee first,” he said.

“Improved understanding of mental health conditions in the workplace can reduce stigma, so that employees can disclose their mental health concerns without fear of discrimination. Support will then be more accessible, through flexible work practices and other strategies, as well as promoting access to treatment.

“The SANE approach will offer the legal community real experience from others in the legal fraternity to help explore issues and show them that they are not alone. While employers often approach mental health concerns from a standpoint of procedure and compliance, we offer empathy by focusing on human interactions and building confidence.”

Research by PwC in partnership with BeyondBlue and The Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance in March 2014 (‘Creating a mentally healthy workplace’) showed that the successful implementation of effective action created a mentally healthy workplace, and that organisations can expect a return on investment of \$2.30 for every dollar spent through a combination of increased productivity, reduced absenteeism and other benefits.

“Legal businesses can make a big difference through leadership in this area, establishing new standards of best practice in workplace mental health for others to emulate,” Mr Heath added.

More information on legalsuper and its products and services can be found at www.legalsuper.com.au. Further information on SANE Australia’s programs, including Mindful Employer can be accessed at www.sane.org and www.mindfulemployer.org

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Formed over 25 years ago, legalsuper now manages in excess of \$2.5 billion on behalf of Judges, Barristers, Lawyers and the support staff and management at legal practices across Australia. Andrew Proebstl can be contacted at aproebstl@legalsuper.com.au.