

## The impact of depression at work

An international study reveals Australians hide their depression at work more than employees in other countries, fearing misunderstanding, stigma, and discrimination

**About this study**  
The study surveyed 1031 adults aged 16-64 from around Australia. All had been in employment during the previous 12 months, including a sub-sample of managers (32%). This survey is part of a broader global audit covering the UK, Germany, France, Denmark, Italy, Spain, and Turkey, as well as Australia. The research was conducted for SANE Australia by IPSOS Australia, and supported by an unrestricted educational grant from Lundbeck.



### How many?

Over a quarter of employees in the survey reported personal experience of depression.

Twenty-six per cent of those surveyed reported that they had received a diagnosis of depression from a doctor or other health professional at some time in life.

This proportion is a little higher than the European average (20%) but the same as in the UK.

Employees with personal experience of depression were more likely to be female, and in an older age group (55-64 years old).

People never diagnosed with depression were far more likely to be in a younger age group (25-34 years old) – as would be expected from a question relating to lifetime experience – or to be in managerial positions in large companies.



### Who knows?

Well over half of employees surveyed knew someone with experience of depression.

Fifty-eight per cent of those surveyed reported that they personally knew someone who had received a diagnosis of depression.

This proportion is broadly similar to that reported in Europe, and almost identical to that in the UK.

People were more likely to know someone with depression if they had a diagnosis themselves (87%) or if they were female (70%) rather than male (46%).

Knowledge of a work colleague with depression was 33%, lower than the European average of 47%. People were more likely to know about a colleague's depression if they were older or were managers in larger companies.



### How long?

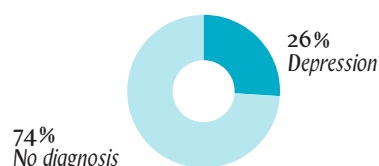
Australians with depression take fewer days off work due to depression than Europeans.

Employees in Australia are as or more likely than their European counterparts to take time off due to depression. They also reported having taken shorter periods of leave during their last episode of illness – almost half took only five days or less of work.

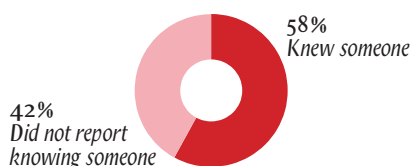
Overall, the average mean number of days taken off during an episode of depression was 14.6 days, less than half the European figure of 35.9 days. The reasons for this wide disparity are not known. It may be due to differences in access to treatment, modes of treatment, or even because of fears regarding stigma and discrimination.

The great majority of managers in Australia (70%) and Europe (55%) confessed that they 'did not know' the number of days lost in their company due to depression.

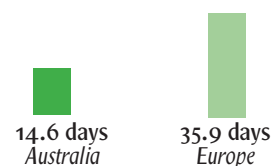
Diagnosis of depression



Know someone with depression



Days off due to depression



# The impact of depression at work



## Who discloses?

Many Australians do not disclose the reason for taking leave after an episode of depression.

Of those surveyed who had taken time off work due to depression, 41% reported that they had not told their employer the true reason.

Australians and Europeans shared their diagnosis with families at similar rates. However, Australians were significantly less likely to disclose to employers: only 26% compared to 34% among Europeans.

When asked why they had not disclosed, fear of misunderstanding and stigma and job insecurity dominated responses.

### Reasons for not disclosing

48% *I felt it would put my job at risk.*

47% *I wouldn't want to tell anyone.*

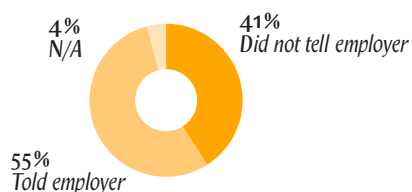
39% *I felt they wouldn't understand.*

23% *I felt they wouldn't know how to help.*

20% *I felt it was too risky.*

While some of the reasons were similar to European rates, others rated significantly higher – especially relating to lack of understanding by employers and an inability by them to provide support. Responses suggest that fear of stigma and discrimination are a real barrier to disclosure, limiting the help available to employees affected by depression. Australia's team-based work culture may also be a factor.

### Disclosed to employer



## What helps?

Less than half of workplaces have support in place to manage the effects of depression.

Only 46% of managers reported having any support from their HR department, and almost a third (29%) reported no formal support in place whatsoever.

Asked what would be most helpful, the most frequent responses were: easy access to psychological counselling services (such as an EAP – Employment Assistance Program), better legislative protection, and education and training for managers and staff.

### What would help in the workplace

73% *Access to counselling services.*

47% *Training for all employees.*

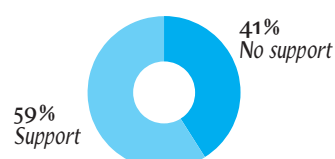
41% *Better legislative protection.*

36% *Training for HR staff.*

34% *Education materials for all employees.*

Larger Australian companies provided significantly better support than their European counterparts. However, access to appropriate support services, and to education and training were recognised as a particular challenge for small to medium-sized businesses.

### Support from HR department



## Recommendations

SANE Australia convened a National Round Table meeting in October 2013 to discuss the study findings, with participants from leading industry and mental health sector organisations, including members of the Mentally Health Workplace Alliance.

Principal recommendations from the Round Table included:

### Recognition of mental health as a workplace issue

*Mental health support needs to be better recognised as an integral aspect of workplace health and safety. Government and industry bodies have a responsibility to promote this recognition among companies, as a measure which benefits both employer and employee.*

### Corporate leadership

*Prominent companies and CEOs can make a big difference through leadership in this area, establishing new standards of best practice in workplace mental health for others to emulate.*

### Access to support

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

### Access to education and training

*Greater use of mental health education and training for managers and staff is needed, such as that provided by beyondblue, SANE Australia's Mindful Employer program, and others.*

## SANE Australia

A national charity helping all Australians affected by mental illness lead a better life.

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