TOP BLOKES
FOUNDATION

THE NEXT GENERATION AT WORK:
WHY YOUNG MEN'S *MENTAL HEALTH* CAN'T WAIT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Australian workplaces are facing a critical challenge: the mental health and wellbeing of young male employees. Seventy-five per cent of mental health issues emerge before a person reaches 24 years old, though treatment typically does not begin until several years later[1].

The transition into work is a high-pressure period for young men under 30, marked by performance expectations, identity shifts and limited help-seeking. When these pressures go unsupported, young men are more likely to experience poor mental health, disengagement, risk-taking behaviours, social isolation and lower productivity in the workplace.

Unaddressed distress can create psychosocial hazards in the workplace, including conflict, aggression, bullying and poor workplace relationships. The business impacts are considerable: reduced productivity, increased absenteeism, safety concerns, turnover and preventable financial loss Yet many workplaces lack the tools and targeted approaches needed to specifically support young men.

While organisations commonly offer Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) or general wellbeing initiatives, young men often distrust or avoid these services due to stigma, fear of career impact, or perceptions of generic, surface-level support. This mismatch leads employers to believe they are providing young men with adequate support. Yet young men report they do not feel these supports are usable. What they need are approaches that feel relevant, trustworthy and grounded in real workplace experience.

To better understand this gap, we drew on insights from more than **30 managers and young men** across sectors, **alongside 12 years of program delivery experience**. Four key themes emerged:

1. THERE IS A DISCONNECT BETWEEN EMPLOYERS AND YOUNG MEN.

Managers commonly observe communication issues, entitlement, disengagement or personal stress. However, young men describe pressure to "prove themselves," unclear expectations, long hours and low psychological safety. This mismatch fuels frustration on both sides.

2. EARLY CHALLENGES AFFECT WELLBEING AND BUSINESS OUTCOMES.

Young men report feeling overwhelmed, fatigued, and disillusioned. This impacts performance, team relationships, retention and workplace culture.

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[1] Kessler R.C., Amminger G.P., Aguilar-Gaxiola S., Alonso J., Lee S. and Ustün T.B. (2007). 'Age of onset of mental disorders: a review of recent literature'. Curr Opin Psychiatry. 20(4):359-64. Online: https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17551351/

3. CURRENT WORKPLACE RESPONSES ARE NOT MEETING THEIR NEEDS.

EAPs and awareness days are helpful, but not enough. Young men don't use existing supports and can find them too generic. Engagement rates in these programs remain low despite high need.

4. EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS SHARE FOUR DESIGN PRINCIPLES:

Approaches that work for young men - and their employers - have four key characteristics:

– Content that is gender-informed and masculinity-sensitive
– Group-based mentoring that builds trust and peer connection
– Flexible, practical, tailored delivery models
– Multiple touchpoints that build consistency, not one-off sessions

Evidence shows that structured mentoring models provide young men with safe spaces to talk openly, build emotional literacy, strengthen communication and develop resilience, skill-building and accountability. These models create measurable improvements in behaviour, wellbeing, and team dynamics.

A recent partnership with the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) demonstrates the impact. Young male personnel reported greater confidence in managing stress, stronger communication and reduced tensions. Leaders observed cultural improvements, higher morale and increased engagement across teams.

Supporting young male mental health is both a moral responsibility and a strategic and safety-critical business investment.

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT EVERY $1 INVESTED IN TARGETED MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVES CAN DELIVER RETURNS OF UP TO $5.70 THROUGH IMPROVED PRODUCTIVITY, REDUCED ABSENTEEISM AND STRONGER RETENTION[2].

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[2] PWC Australia (2017). Creating a Mentally Healthy Workplace: Return on Investment Analysis. Online: https://www.pwc.com.au/publications/pdf/beyondblue-workplace-roi-may14.pdf, p. 27.

SUPPORTING YOUNG MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING IN THE WORKPLACE: A GUIDE FOR MANAGERS

Young men entering the workforce face a unique set of mental health challenges. Entering the workforce can be a turbulent time for young men. They can feel pressure to perform at work, uncertainty about their sense of purpose or identity, have shifting personal priorities and may not reach out for help when they need it.

Young men entering the workforce are particularly vulnerable to these risks. Left unaddressed, these struggles can result in poor mental health, risk-taking behaviours, disengagement from work and study, and social isolation.

If employers don't take action, this can create additional psychosocial hazards in the workplace, such as interpersonal conflict, violence, aggression and bullying[3].

The consequences for employers are significant: failure to meet workplace health and safety obligations, higher absenteeism, lower productivity and profit loss[4]. Yet most organisations lack the tools or expertise to respond effectively.

Although many organisations offer Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) or general workplace wellbeing initiatives, these supports are often underused by young men due to stigma and distrust. Young men benefit most from targeted approaches that are practical, tailored to their lived experience, and that support them over a longer period to create lasting behavioural change.

Without targeted and evidence-based approaches, workplaces risk ongoing disruption to culture, performance, and retention. Young men miss opportunities to build personal skills that will support them at work and beyond.

To understand this gap, we consulted with over 30 managers and young male employees across a range of sectors. This whitepaper draws on their insights and Top Blokes' 12 years of experience delivering evidence-based mentoring programs. In this paper, we share our key findings and practical steps your workplace can take to improve wellbeing, strengthen culture and enhance performance.

A PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARD IS ANYTHING THAT COULD HARM SOMEONE'S MENTAL HEALTH E.G. JOB DEMANDS, LOW JOB CONTROL, POOR SUPPORT, POOR WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS AND INTERACTIONS.

PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS CAN CREATE STRESS WHICH CAN RESULT IN PSYCHOLOGICAL OR PHYSICAL HARM.

EMPLOYERS HAVE A LEGAL OBLIGATION TO ELIMINATE PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS, OR IF THAT IS NOT REASONABLY POSSIBLE, MINIMISE THEM. SOURCE: SAFEWORK AUSTRALIA.

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[3] SafeWork Australia (no date). Psychosocial Hazards. Online: https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/safety-topic/managing-health-and-safety/mental-health/psychosocial-hazards

[4] Mental Health Commission (2024). Blueprint for Mentally Healthy Workplaces. Online: https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-12/blueprint-for-mentally-healthy-workplaces-release-3-2024.pdf, p. 4; Productivity Commission (2020). Mental Health: Productivity Commission Inquiry Report, Vol, 1. Online: https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries-and-research/mental-health/report/, pps. 49-50.

THE EVIDENCE: UNDERSTANDING YOUNG MALE MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

Young men experience higher rates of mental health issues than other age groups. This can influence their transition into work, their lifestyle choices, and their relationships in the workplace and beyond.

Young men aged 16-24 experience higher rates of 12-month anxiety disorders, affective disorders and substance use disorders than older men[5].

2 in 3 people who die by suicide are male[6].

1 in 5 young males have thought about hurting or killing themselves at some point in their life[7].

Men who are not lonely have significantly better mental health: they are less likely to be depressed, experience anxiety of any suicidality[8].

Only 1 in 4 men say they would seek help from a mental health professional if they were struggling. 1 in 4 men would not seek help from anyone[9].

Exposure to work-related stressors such as job insecurity, low control, high demands and harassment is associated with increased risk of psychological distress[10,11,12].

Precarious employment in early adulthood increases the risk of mental health issues later in life, with the effect being slightly stronger for males[13].

Younger workers are at higher risk of workplace-related harm than older workers[14].

[5] Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023). National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing. Available: https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/mental-health/national-study-mental-health-and-wellbeing/latest-release#prevalence-of-mental-disorders.

[6] Australian Bureau of Statistics (2024). Causes of Death, Australia. Available: https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/causes-death/causes-death-australia/latest-release#intentional-self-harm-deaths-suicide-in-australia.

[7] Terhaag, S., Quinn, B., Swami, N. and Daraganova, G. (2020). 'Mental health of Australian males: depression, suicidality and loneliness', Insights Report 1. Online: https://aifs.gov.au/tentomen/insights-report/insights-1-report-overview-and-key-findings.

[8] Terhaag et al., op. cit.

[9] Terhaag et al., op. cit.

[10] Law, P., Too, L., Butterworth, P., Witt, K., Reavley, N., Milner, A., & Milner, A. (2020). 'A systematic review on the effect of work-related stressors on mental health of young workers'. International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health, 93, 611-622. Available: https://doi.org/10.1007/s00420-020-01516-7.

[11] Thern, E., Matilla-Santander, N., Hernando-Rodriguez, J., Almroth, M., & Bodin, T. (2023). 'Precarious employment in early adulthood and later mental health problems: a register-linked cohort study'. Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, 77, 755 - 761. Available: https://doi.org/10.1136/jech-2023-220817.

[12] Gray, B., Grey, C., Hookway, A., Homolova, L., & Davies, A. (2020). 'Differences in the impact of precarious employment on health across population subgroups: a scoping review'. Perspectives in Public Health, 141, 37 - 49. https://doi.org/10.1177/1757913920971333.

[13] Law, P., Too, L., Butterworth, P., Witt, K., Reavley, N., Milner, A., & Milner, A. (2020). 'A systematic review on the effect of work-related stressors on mental health of young workers'. International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health, 93, 611-622. Available: https://doi.org/10.1007/s00420-020-01516-7.

[14] Mental Health Commission (2023). Entering the Workforce and Young Workers. Online: https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-10/career-transition-guides---paper-2-entering-the-workforce-and-young-workers.pdf, p. 5.

THE ROLE OF WORK IN SUPPORTING YOUNG MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH

Employment is recognised as a protective factor for positive mental health[15,16,17]. Work provides financial security, routine, social connection, and a sense of purpose - contributing to wellbeing, self-worth, and autonomy. For young men entering the workforce, these benefits can be particularly powerful, supporting confidence, identity development and resilience during a formative life stage.

Businesses that proactively support mental health and wellbeing do more than meet their legal obligations. They also realise significant organisational benefits[18,19]:

For every $1 invested in workplace mental health, businesses see a return of approximately $2.30 and up to $5.70, depending on industry[20].

Absenteeism, presenteeism and compensation claims decrease, leading to measurable financial savings.

Employee engagement, loyalty, performance and productivity increase.

Workplaces become employers of choice, strengthening recruitment and retention.

Psychological health and safety improve, reducing exposure to psychosocial risks.

Compliance obligations are easier to meet, including WHS, workers' compensation, discrimination and workplace relations requirements.

The benefits extend beyond the workplace. When young men are mentally healthy at work, the positive effects ripple out into their families, relationships and the wider community.

[15] ATelford, N., Albrecht, S., Wilkin, A., Watts, C. and Rickwood, D. (2024). 'Mental Health Outcomes for Young People Accessing Individual Placement Support Services: A Cohort Study'. J Prim Care Community Health. Nov 4;15. Available: https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11539089/#abstract1.
[16] Modini, M., Joyce, S., Mykletun, A., Christensen, H., Bryant, R., Mitchell, P., and Harvey, S. (2016). 'The Mental Health Benefits of Employment: Results of a Systematic Meta-Review'. Australian Psychiatry. 24:4. Available: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1039856215618523.
[17] Australian Bureau of Statistics (2024b). Autism in Australia, 2022. Available: https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/autism-australia-2022#autism-and-work.
[18] Productivity Commission (2020), op. cit., pps. 49-50.
[19] Mental Health Commission (2024), op. cit, p. 4.
[20] PWC Australia (2017), op. cit., p. 27.

A DISCONNECT EXISTS BETWEEN EMPLOYERS AND YOUNG MALE EMPLOYEES

Managers across sectors recognise that many young men are struggling at work, but their explanations for why this is happening often differ from what young men themselves describe. This misalignment signals a clear disconnect - one that affects communication, expectations, performance and wellbeing. Bridging this gap is essential for preventing psychosocial risks and building workplaces where young men feel supported and able to thrive.

WHAT MANAGERS SEE

Managers shared several challenges they commonly observe among young male employees:

– Poor or inconsistent communication skills.
– Difficulty adjusting expectations around career progression, responsibilities, with workplace realities.
– Perceived entitlement or unrealistic assumptions about the pace or nature of career advancement.

Many noted that personal stressors - relationship difficulties, financial pressure, gambling, alcohol or drug use - can spill into the workplace, influencing behaviour, reliability and performance at work.

These challenges can also surface in how young men interact with female colleagues, sometimes creating tension or conflict.

Managers also recognised that the fast-paced nature of modern work leaves little room for men to openly discuss challenges, reflect on expectations, or build meaningful and healthy peer connections.

WHAT YOUNG MEN EXPERIENCE

Young men painted a different picture. They described high pressure to meet workplace expectations while projecting confidence, resilience and independence - traits linked to socially dominant forms of masculinity.

A consistent theme was the impact of excessive workloads, long hours and constant pressure to perform. These factors contributed to feelings of overwhelm, fatigue, and disconnection, impacting life outside of work and mental health.

Young men reported feeling unsupported by senior staff, citing unclear guidance, poor communication and hesitancy to ask for help as key issues.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

When managers and young men hold fundamentally different views of what is driving workplace challenges, the result is frustration, misinterpretation and missed opportunities for early support. This disconnect can allow preventable stressors to escalate into psychosocial hazards such as conflict, bullying, aggression or relational breakdowns within teams.

Young men are worried about being judged, appearing weak or facing repercussions for speaking up. As a result, they can internalise stress until it affects performance, wellbeing or relationships at work.

It is critical for employers to design supports that reduce risk, improve safety and strengthen culture.

WHAT YOUNG MEN TOLD US

"We're expected to not get emotional or be affected by things but that's just not fair or realistic" - Max, 28, Hospitality.

"Being a man in certain industries puts a target on your back and creates certain social requirements..." - Dominic, 23, Healthcare and Social Assistance.

"It's unclear what the career progression pathway is." - Franklin, 26, Law.

'[Work is] really busy, feels like I can't keep up.' - Carlos, 27, IT.

"[There is an] expectation that being young you can always offer and do more despite giving your best...Being in an all male group makes it harder to express emotional availability." - Nirav, 27, Construction.

"A lot of top-down pressure means each level of management in my department is under increasing pressure which just gets passed down and passed down. It seems like there is no effective communication and a lot of blame shifting.' - Adam, 28, Hospitality.

"Male skippers are always rough and angry with no emotional regulation. When these people run the ship they do a poor job at commanding leadership and respect" - James, 29, Hospitality.

"Overloaded with work as I work in the engineering construction field, where time is money. This includes long (unpaid) hours, minimum 10 hour days on site. We work in a sink or swim environment, with little room for error in certain disciplines as most works are considered high risk high potential." - Yusuf, 29, Engineering.

"It's very challenging nowadays, hard to find where you fit in and where you will go." - Nikolas, 25, Engineering.

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WHAT MANAGERS TOLD US

"We don't have much opportunity to engage on a day to day level where we can talk about male topics. There is not enough opportunity to build connection. We don't have the time to talk about wellbeing or meet outside of work." - Daniel, Manager, medium size engineering and manufacturing business.

"The workplace is very blokey and older staff push the guys to work harder and young staff feel like they are not able to speak up. Psychological safety legislation means we are thinking more about this" - Craig, Manager, large manufacturing business.

"We need to reduce the general divide and let the younger guys be ok to be different. Each person has their own path for mental health" - Craig, Manager, large manufacturing business.

WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO

1. EQUIP MANAGERS TO SUPPORT YOUNG MEN EFFECTIVELY.

Managers are often the first to notice emerging issues, but may not feel confident responding. Provide training that builds their understanding of young men and their capability to support them. Strengthening leadership capability ensures support is proactive, consistent and aligned with WHS obligations.

2. CREATE SPACE FOR GENUINE CONVERSATION.

Young men quickly recognise when check-ins are superficial. Encourage leaders to take time for authentic conversations that prioritise listening, curiosity and understanding over quick fixes. Feeling heard can significantly reduce stress, build trust and prevent small issues from escalating.

3. PROVIDE CLARITY, CONTEXT AND REGULAR FEEDBACK.

Young men described uncertainty about expectations and frustration with inconsistent communication. Help build confidence and engagement by:

– Clearly outlining role expectations and performance standards.
– Explaining how their work contributes to team and organisational goals.
– Offering regular, constructive feedback.
– Acknowledging growth and effort.

A stronger sense of purpose and direction improves motivation, retention and workplace cohesion.

THESE CHALLENGES AFFECT WELLBEING, RELATIONSHIPS, AND BUSINESS OUTCOMES

The difficulties young men face at work are not just personal struggles; they have direct implications for team dynamics, workplace culture and organisational performance.

Left unaddressed, these can escalate into psychosocial hazards, undermine respect among colleagues, and place additional strain on managers. Employers see the impact through absenteeism, reduced productivity, workflow disruptions and financial loss[21].

HOW CHALLENGES AFFECT WORKPLACES

Managers highlighted the organisational consequences of these pressures. When young men struggle, employers often face:

– Time-consuming performance management processes.
– Strained team dynamics and interpersonal conflict.
– Reduced collaboration and increased silos.
– Challenges in maintaining a safe, respectful culture.

These issues increase workloads for leaders, heighten psychosocial risks across teams and loss of morale. They also impact productivity and profit, particularly in high-pressure or labour-intensive industries.

"…it becomes very nasty and cutthroat [in my team] and everyone is out there to prove themselves. This creates a toxic environment… other departments don't want to interact with my team. So our teams get siloed, and there is no interaction. This impacts workflow, resources aren't used properly, profitability is reduced." - Ryan, Manager, large professional services business.

HOW THESE CHALLENGES AFFECT YOUNG MEN

Young men reported feeling overwhelmed and unsupported at work. Many reported long hours, high workloads and persistent performance pressure that spills into their personal lives. The result is frustration, disillusionment and a decline in wellbeing and relationships outside of work.

Their experiences highlight how workplace conditions intersect with identity, family responsibilities and societal expectations.

"Many young engineers and workers in general experience burnout often, and amongst older workers there are numerous divorces due to work commitments." - Yusuf, 29, Engineering.

"I believe there's more pressure in a societal sense for young men to perform as their older counterparts, as we are generally seen as lazy." - Thomas, 29, Engineering.

"It is tough, trying to juggle what it means to be a father…while also prioritising home life. It is also difficult to build my career while not sacrificing time with friends, family, health etc." - Paul, 29, Construction.

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[21] Mental Health Commission (2024), op. cit., p. 4; Productivity Commission (2020), op. cit., pps. 49-50.

WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO

1. BE CLEAR AND PROVIDE CONSISTENT, CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK.

Unclear expectations can undermine confidence and increase stress. Help young men and your teams succeed by:

– Defining expectations clearly.
– Checking understanding.
– Providing regular, balanced feedback.
– Recognising effort, progress and initiative.

Clarity builds confidence and supports early intervention.

2. SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT, BELONGING AND CONNECTION.

Isolation contributes to disengagement and burnout.
Create opportunities for young men to:

– Learn new skills, take on challenges.
– Build peer relationships through cross-team collaboration.
– Connect with their team and leaders.
– Access break spaces for rest and downtime.
– Avoid an 'eat at your desk' culture that exacerbates stress.

3. PROMOTE PHYSICAL WELLBEING AND HEALTHY ROUTINES.

Physical health strongly influences mental health.
Encourage practices such as:

– Walking meetings.
– Team sport or physical activity.
– Regular breaks.
– Visible wellbeing resources.

These simple wellbeing habits can reduce stress, improve mood and support resilience.

INSIGHT 3:

WORKPLACES ARE PROACTIVE, BUT CURRENT APPROACHES FALL SHORT

Many workplaces are making genuine efforts to support mental health. Organisations invest in EAPs, promote mental health awareness days, or deliver training such as Mental Health First Aid. Development goals are embedded into performance reviews as a way of supporting young males. These initiatives demonstrate commitment, and they play an important role.

Howeve,r these approaches do not address the specific experiences, pressures and help-seeking barriers young men face. As a result, they struggle to generate meaningful, sustained behavioural change or shift workplace culture in the ways young men say they need.

WHY CURRENT APPROACHES DON'T REACH YOUNG MEN

Research shows that male employees encounter persistent barriers to engaging with traditional workplace supports. These include:

– Limited understanding of what EAPs offer.

– Concern about confidentiality and trustworthiness.

– Fear of stigma or judgment.

– Belief that seeking support will jeopardise career prospects.

– Perception that wellbeing programs are too generic or disconnected from real workplace pressures[22].

Instead, workplaces need approaches that are tailored, practical, and able to meaningfully and deeply connect directly with young men through relationships of trust and authenticity[23,24]. These themes were echoed in the voices of the young men and managers we spoke to:

"We have been contemplating programs [for young male employees] but we haven't been able to grasp the exact need and solution for that cohort." - Ryan, Manager, large professional services business.

"I haven't used [the wellbeing and support programs at work] and don't fully understand how to use them" - Paul, 28, IT.

"It is a taboo to utilise them (workplace wellbeing and support programs)" - Yusuf, 29, Engineering.

"I used it once for career advice and didn't find it helpful - just thought the advice was too generic and got me nowhere." - Luke, 26, Logistics/transport.

"They are a welcome break and help you deal with stress and anxiety to a certain extent." - Nikolas, 25, Engineering.

[22] Matthews, L., Gerland, J. and Jessup, G. (2021). 'Exploring men's use of mental health support offered by an Australian Employee Assistance Program (EAP): perspectives from a focus-group study with males working in blue- and white-collar industries'. Int J Ment Health Syst. 15:68 https://doi.org/10.1186/s13033-021-00489-5.

[23] Matthews et al. (2021), Ibid.

[24] Gmitroski, T., Bradley, C., Heinemann, L., Liu, G., Blanchard, P., Beck, C., Mathias, S., Leon, A., & Barbic, S. (2018). 'Barriers and facilitators to employment for young adults with mental illness: a scoping review'. BMJ Open, 8. Available: https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2018-024487.

WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO

1. PROVIDE STRONG ROLE MODELS AND MENTORSHIP.

Young men benefit significantly from leaders and mentors who model the values, behaviours and communication styles expected in the workplace. Pair young men with mentors who are:

– Trusted and respected.

– Trained and/or experienced in effective communication skills.

– Able to demonstrate healthy and positive masculinities.

– Committed to regular check-ins.

Role models can help shape culture and young men actively look to them for cues on how to navigate workplace expectations.

2. EMBED CULTURAL CHANGE INTO DAILY PRACTICE.

Announcing a wellbeing initiative is not enough. For cultural change to last, it must be reinforced consistently through:

– Visible leadership behaviour.

– Team norms and rituals.

– Performance conversations.

– Recognition and reward systems.

– Aligned policies and training.

When young men see these expectations lived every day, not just promoted once, trust grows and behaviour shifts.

3. AUDIT YOUR WELLBEING AND SUPPORT OFFERING.

Consider your wellbeing offerings. Speak to young men and ask:

– Do young male employees know what is available and know how to access supports?

– Do young male employees trust the confidentiality and purpose of these supports?

– Are the offerings relevant to the lived experiences of young men?

– Are the offerings practical, relational and long-term or mostly generic and short-term?

INSIGHT 4:

FOUR DESIGN PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING EFFECTIVE WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS FOR YOUNG MEN

Evidence consistently shows that **mentoring-based approaches are among the most effective ways to support young men's mental health and development in the workplace**. Mentoring provides safe, predictable and relational spaces where young men can engage in open conversation, practice skills , and build accountability. These models help young men manage personal challenges, strengthen workplace relationships, and improve their overall wellbeing.

Through our research and program experience, four core design principles emerged as essential for creating effective, sustainable and culturally relevant mental health programs for young men at work.

1. GENDER-SPECIFIC AND MASCULINITY SENSITIVE CONTENT.

Many workplace wellbeing initiatives take a universal or gender neutral approach. While valuable, they rarely address the experiences that shape young men's behaviour. Programs designed specifically for young men - and grounded in contemporary, healthy masculinities frameworks - can create a space where they feel understood, represented and safe to open up.

Offering a male-specific program that incorporates masculinity-sensitive content effectively engages young men and helps them open up[25,26,27].

[25] Our Watch. (2020). A summary of: tracking progress in prevention. Online: https://www.ourwatch.org.au/change-the-story/tracking-progress-in-prevention, p. 10; Pirkis, J., King, K., Rice, S., Seidler, Z., Leckning, B., Oliffe, J., Vella, Smasculinity-sensitive. and Schlichthorst, M. (2016). 'Preventing suicide in boys and men' in: Pompili, M. (eds)specifically Suicide Risk Assessment and Prevention. Springer, Cham. Online: https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-3-030-42003-1_25#DOI, p. 7.

[26] Robertson, S., Gough, B., Hanna, E., Raine, G., Robinson, M., Seims, A., & White, A. (2016). Successful mental health promotion with men: the evidence from 'tacit knowledge'. Health Promotion International, 33, 334–344. https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daw067.

[27] Sagar-Ouriaghli, I., Godfrey, E., Bridge, L., Meade, L., & Brown, J. (2019). Improving Mental Health Service Utilization Among Men: A Systematic Review and Synthesis of Behavior Change Techniques Within Interventions Targeting Help-Seeking. American Journal of Men's Health, 13. https://doi.org/10.1177/1557988319857009.

2. MENTORING THAT BUILDS BOTH PEER AND LEADER CONNECTIONS.

Traditional 1:1 mentoring can be helpful, particularly for informal and job-focused specific feedback. But young men often thrive in group-based mentoring where two trained mentors consistently lead and work with a small group of young men. Research shows that group mentoring improves young people's social skills, confidence and relationships[28].

In workplace settings, group mentoring fosters:

– Positive and respectful male peer relationships
– Shared problem-solving
– Support networks beyond the immediate team
– Opportunities to safely challenge unhealthy norms

These environments/spaces help young men feel less isolated and more connected to their colleagues and workplace culture.

Group mentoring can also promote positive and respectful male peer relations that both challenge and support young men[29].

3. FLEXIBLE, TAILORED CONTENT AND DELIVERY.

Young men vary widely in their knowledge, readiness and confidence when engaging with mental health and wellbeing content. To be effective, mentoring-based models can't be one-size-fits-all. They need to meet young men where they are at, taking into account their knowledge, readiness, and physical, social, and cultural environments.

This means:

– Designing content that feels relevant to their day-to-day work.
– Acknowledging different levels of vulnerability, confidence and communication comfort.
– Allowing space for personal reflection, discussion and skill-building.

Flexibility increases engagement by helping young men internalise concepts more deeply.

4. MULTIPLE POINTS OF ENGAGEMENT OVER TIME.

Short, one-off workshops may raise awareness - but evidence shows that long-term programs shift behaviours or attitudes in a lasting way. Young men benefit from multiple, consistent touchpoints that reinforce learning, build trust and create space for reflection.

Research shows that for programs to be effective, young men need to engage with an intervention multiple times. Sixteen or more hours of program time across multiple points has been identified as a good starting point[30].

For employers, the benefits are clear: measurable improvements in behaviour, communication and productivity, as well as a more respectful and supportive workplace culture. By investing in mentoring strategies tailored to young men, workplaces can move beyond short-term fixes and achieve long-term results.

[28] Herrera, C., Vang, Z. and Gale, L. (2002). Group mentoring: a study of mentoring groups in three programs. Online: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/234589670_Group_Mentoring_A_Study_of_Mentoring_Groups_in_Three_Programs, pps. 34-40; Kuperminc, G. and Deutsch, N. (2021). Group mentoring: National Mentoring Resource Centre model review. Online: https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Updated_GroupMentoringReview.pdf.

[29] Our Watch. (2021). Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia (2nd ed.). Online: https://www.ourwatch.org.au/change-the-story, p. 51.

[30] Elliot et al. (2022) op cit., p. 44; FFlood, M., Hewson-Munro, S. and Keddie, A. (2024). 'A critical stocktake of community-based healthy masculinities programs in Victoria, Australia', Journal of Men's Studies. Online: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/10608265241249941, pps. 11-12; Australian Institute of Criminology. (2020). National Crime Prevention Framework. Online: https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/national-crime-prevention-framework.pdf, p. 7.

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WHAT YOUNG MEN TOLD US

Most young men we spoke to expressed a strong interest, or were potentially interested, in a program designed specifically for young male employees:

"It's relevant. I feel the topics covered and discussed would be useful and I could relate and potentially could network with similar individuals to myself." - Paul, 28, IT.

"Would be nice to have that social connection." - Cameron, 23, Hospitality.

"I think there is a lot of help that can be provided by addressing and unpacking the ingrained social gendered expectations." - Max, 28, Hospitality.

"I would welcome the fact I could participate right at the office, I think it's necessary to manage stress, anxiety, etc, and would help save me time." - Nikolas, 25, Engineering.

"Something that is provided for young men will be beneficial to keeping employees happy and potentially more productive in their roles." - Yusuf, 29, Engineering.

WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO

1. PROVIDE STRUCTURED OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONNECTION.

Move beyond informal check-ins by offering facilitated group spaces where young men can learn, share experiences and build skills together. These structured environments reduce isolation and build confidence.

2. INVEST IN SPECIALIST GROUP MENTORING PROGRAMS.

Partner with organisations that deliver evidence-based, mentored, tailored to young men's needs. Specialist programs provide consistency, psychological safety, and measurable, scalable outcomes. Connect with Top Blokes to learn more about our workplace mentoring program for young men

3. EMBED MENTAL HEALTH IN WORKPLACE SAFETY AND CULTURE.

Treat mental health as a core WHS responsibility rather than an add-on. Ensure policies, procedures and training reflect this commitment, and reinforce the message through leadership behaviour and performance expectations.

CASE STUDY:

HOW THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE BUILT STRONGER TEAMS BY FOCUSING ON YOUNG MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH

The Royal Australian Airforce (RAAF) has recognised the unique mental health challenges faced by young male personnel. In 2023 they asked Top Blokes to deliver the Top Blokes Workplace Program to young male airforce personnel. Since then, more than 170 young men from RAAF have participated in the program.

The program aims to foster a supportive environment for young males, promote open conversations about mental health and wellbeing and equip young males with the communication and personal skills they need to thrive at work.

Participants report feeling better connected to each other, and less alone in their every day struggles at work and in their personal lives.

"I felt pressure to prove myself in a role surrounded by many leaders, which added stress to the job...I learned in order to take that nervous load off, you need absolute communication. Then you start to get real comfortable, real fast, which creates a better space to express how you're thinking and feeling, ultimately adding to your quality and output at work." - RAAF participant in Top Blokes Workplace Program

"Since completing the Top Blokes program, we've seen a significant shift in how our young male employees communicate. Many were bottling up stress and challenges, but now they have the skills to address issues early, reducing workplace tensions and improving overall team dynamics. This program has helped foster a culture where our team feel comfortable speaking up and seeking support when needed.

This program has strengthened the wellbeing of our team and led to tangible workplace improvements and a noticeable boost in engagement and morale. The impact is clear: when our employees feel supported, they show up, contribute, and thrive which all leads to a more cohesive and driven team." - Ryan Hodgson, FSGT (E8) (aka Flight Sergeant), HQACG (aka Air Combat Group), RAAF Williamtown.

An evaluation of the program found:

- **Increased awareness of mental health challenges** faced by young men in the RAAF.
- **Participation in Top Blokes boosted engagement with other mental health initiatives**: increase in participation and engagement in mental health programs and discussions.
- **Top Blokes programs contributed to a cultural shift** by promoting openness and support regarding mental health.

These results show the effectiveness of tailored mentoring programs in addressing the mental health needs of young men in the workplace. By creating supportive environments and encouraging open dialogue, organisations can foster a culture that prioritises mental health and wellbeing.

CONCLUSION: THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW

Young men are entering the workforce during a period of intense pressure, rapid change and growing mental health challenges. Their experiences, shaped by identity, expectations, work culture and help-seeking norms, have profound implications not only for their own wellbeing, but also for team dynamics, workplace safety and organisational performance.

This whitepaper highlighted four core insights:

– **A disconnect exists** between managerial perceptions and the lived experience of young male employees.

– **These challenges ripple outward**, affecting wellbeing, relationships and business outcomes.

– **While workplaces are proactive**, current approaches often fail to reach or meaningfully engage young men.

– **Effective support requires targeted, relational and sustained approaches**, grounded in evidence and tailored to the pressures facing young men today.

The message is clear: **strengthening support for young male employees is not simply a wellbeing initiative, it is a strategic, cultural and safety-critical investment.**

When young men feel understood, connected and supported, workplaces see measurable benefits, including stronger engagement, safer teams, healthier relationships, improved productivity and greater retention. These gains extend far beyond the individual, shaping families, communities and the next generation of Australia's workforce.

Employers now have an opportunity and a responsibility to create environments where young men can thrive. By investing in tailored, sustained, and trust-based approaches, organisations can build the conditions for long-term cultural change and a more resilient workforce.

TAKE THE NEXT STEP IN SUPPORTING YOUNG MEN AT WORK.

Top Blokes Foundation delivers structured, evidence-based mentoring programs that improve communication, resilience and connection among young male employees, driving stronger retention, safer teams and better performance.

Book a free 20-minute strategy call today to discuss how we can support your workforce. Contact our State Manager, Daniel Allars.

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