

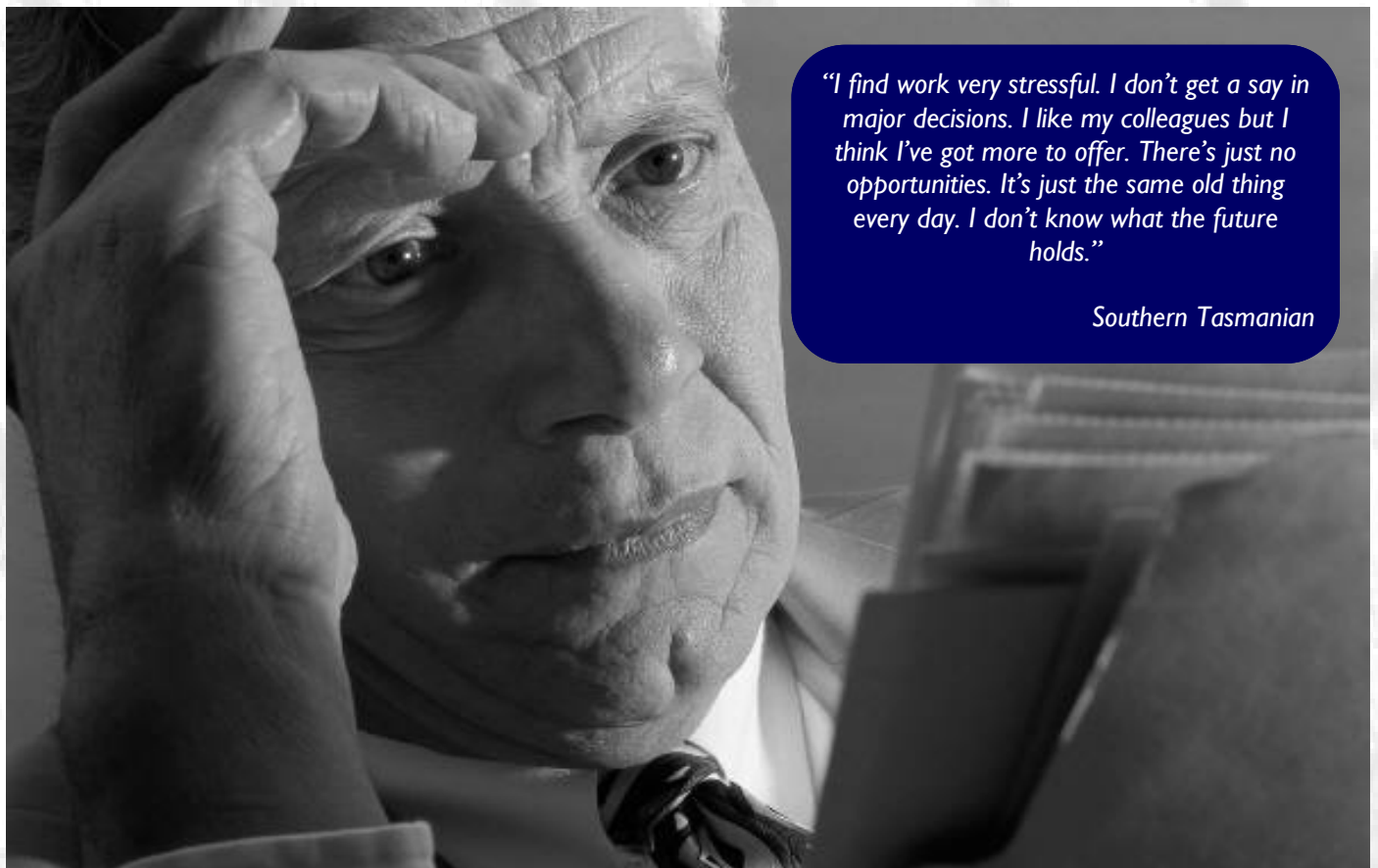
Why it's important

People who have a job generally experience better health than those who do not. However, the relationship between having a job and health is not straightforward. The structure of workplaces, the way power is managed and decision making is undertaken, as well as the social organisation and relationships that exist in a workplace, all impact on health and wellbeing.

Working conditions are an important social determinant of health because of the significant amount of time we spend in our workplaces. Improved working conditions lead to a healthier workforce, which leads to improved productivity, and hence to a still healthier, more productive workforce. People who are already among the most vulnerable in our society will generally experience poorer working conditions than those on higher incomes with higher levels of education.

Some examples of how work and health are linked are outlined below.

- People who experience stress in the workplace are more likely to take sick leave, experience poor health overall and die prematurely.
- Studies have shown that not having the opportunity to contribute to work in a meaningful way, not having control over one's work and receiving inadequate rewards for effort, are strongly related to an increased risk of lower back pain, sickness absence and cardio-vascular disease.
- High stress jobs predispose individuals to high blood pressure, cardio-vascular diseases, and physical and psychological problems such as depression and anxiety.



"I find work very stressful. I don't get a say in major decisions. I like my colleagues but I think I've got more to offer. There's just no opportunities. It's just the same old thing every day. I don't know what the future holds."

Southern Tasmanian

Why is work an issue for the health of Tasmanians?

Workforce participation rates are lower in Tasmania

As at April 2016, around 60% of Tasmanians participated in the workforce including around 65% of men and 55% of women.¹ The labour force participation rate for Australia as a whole was 71% of men and 60% of women²

Women do a significant amount of unpaid work

Economic and social changes at a national level over recent decades have increased opportunities for women to participate in the paid workforce.³ Between 1992 and 2014, the proportion of women who were employed increased from 48% to 55%.³ While women have assumed a greater role in the workplace, they have not been compensated by the amount of work undertaken around the home.³ In addition, gender equality at senior levels in the workplace has yet to be achieved.^{2,3}

Workplace injury is common in Tasmania

In 2012 there were 8,974 injuries reported in Tasmania.⁴ The most common were traumatic joint, ligament, muscle and tendon injuries.⁴ There were 451 mental illness injuries, with 69% relating to anxiety and stress.⁴

Casual jobs are common

Many Tasmanians are not offered job security with at least a ¼ of all employees working on a casual basis.⁵ Casual employment, which has been a growth area in recent years, can provide greater flexibility for balancing work, family, study and other commitments, but casual employees do not necessarily receive the same entitlements and job security as their full-time, on-going colleagues, and this can generate significant stress.

Sitting on the job can be bad for health

Many Australians sit for considerable amounts of time each day, including in the workplace. 'White collar' office workers spend around ¾ of their working hours sedentary and many 'blue collar' non-office based workers also accrue considerable amounts of sitting time at work. Excessive sitting is consistently associated with markers of poor health and can impact on cardio-vascular and mental health, and contribute to musculoskeletal disorders.⁶

Equity in job opportunities needs to improve in Tasmania

Certain groups of workers such as Family Carers are often disadvantaged when it comes to job opportunities and having a voice in the workplace. Barriers to paid employment for carers include difficulties experienced in arranging working hours around their caring responsibilities and lack of alternative care. Even after their caring role has finished, they may experience barriers to employment such as lack of recent job experience, out of date qualifications and lack of confidence. People with disabilities, Aboriginal people, those from low socio-economic communities and people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities also experience many employment challenges.

References & Resources

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Communities

- Support and encourage workplaces to provide 'healthy work environments' for workers (for ideas see: dhhs.tas.gov.au/healthpromotion/survey and people.tas.gov.au/themes/people_performance/healthyatwork).
- Speak out (write letters to politicians, become part of lobby groups and/or write to the media) about the importance of health and wellbeing in the workplace.
- Encourage local workplaces to foster strong links with the community around them.
- Support workers when they advocate for permanent employment, fair pay and just conditions.
- Contribute to developing a culture in the community that values workplaces but also values the need for families to spend time together.
- Provide community events that enable families to spend time together away from the workplace.
- Develop social enterprise projects and apply principles of *Asset Based Community Development*, which focus on strengths rather than weaknesses within communities. Visit: abcdinstitute.org for more information.
- Advocate for jobs and conditions that are suitable for single parents, carers, people with mental and physical disabilities and others who may experience disadvantage in the labour market.

Individuals

- Talk to managers about worker health and wellbeing to ensure this becomes a workplace priority.
- Speak out as a group to management if workplace conditions are not conducive to health and wellbeing.
- Initiate, and participate in workplace social, health and wellbeing programs.
- Speak out (write letters to politicians, become part of lobby groups and/or write to the media) about workplace health and wellbeing.
- Contribute to the creation of safe workplaces that aim to prevent injury.
- Model healthy work practices including showing respect and care for other colleagues.
- Encourage employers to offer incentive programs that lead to enhanced health and wellbeing outcomes for workers.
- Encourage employers to link with the *Business in Mind* program. See: businessinmind.edu.au.



Workplaces (Managers, Workers, Volunteers) & Service Providers

- Ensure all employees have the opportunity to be involved in decision-making.
- Recognise the role of trade unions in all workplaces.
- Provide equal pay for work of equal value.
- Strive for good management practices that ensure appropriate rewards in terms of money, conditions, status and self-esteem for all employees.
- Monitor workplace accidents and absenteeism rates and take action to prevent problems.
- Provide ergonomically appropriate workplaces and implement initiatives to reduce long periods of sitting.
- Provide health and wellbeing promotion programs that help prevent stress, enhance confidence and boost self esteem of workers.
- Implement appropriate performance management policies and procedures to address workplace stress.
- Provide flexible work environments and job security.
- Recognise and reward good work, provide employee incentives and provide a stimulating work environment in which workers feel that they can have a voice.
- Talk to your employees about what makes them feel good at work and what makes them feel stressed, and take appropriate action to reduce this.
- Recognise that stressors from outside of the workplace may filter into the workplace. Provide support for staff experiencing undue stress. Link with the *Business in Mind* program. See: businessinmind.edu.au.

Politicians & Governments

- Provide legislative frameworks and policies to ensure that Tasmanians do not work excessive hours.
- Provide legislative frameworks and policies to ensure that Tasmanians receive fair pay.
- Implement policies and strategies that improve the conditions of employees in high strain, low income jobs.
- Support initiatives such as the *Business in Mind* program. See: businessinmind.edu.au.
- Provide incentives for workplaces to offer permanent positions to people, rather than only casual employment.
- Encourage employers to reduce discrimination in their workplaces regarding the employment of people with health problems, disabilities and those who are carers.
- Link employment advisors with health services - e.g. when a person presents to their GP with issues relating to employment and work, ensure they are given the opportunity to see an employment advisor.