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About Racing Mates

The Racing Mates program is a peer support initiative launched by Racing NSW in 2016, designed to promote mental health awareness and provide practical support to participants in the NSW Thoroughbred Racing Industry.

It emphasises the importance of "mates looking out for mates," fostering a culture of openness and early intervention to address issues like stress, isolation, addiction, and personal crises common in the high-pressure world of horse racing.



The primary objective of Racing Mates is to create a supportive culture within the racing environment by empowering peers to recognise signs of distress in their colleagues and guide them toward appropriate help. It's more than just a helpline; it leverages existing relationships and trust within the industry.

“ Racing is tough, but no one faces it alone. Racing Mates is about building a stronger, healthier racing community. ”

Key aspects of the program include:



Peer Support

The program relies on “Racing Mates Ambassadors,” who are respected industry figures with lived experience of the unique challenges in racing. They are not professional counsellors but offer a relatable and understanding first point of contact.



Awareness Events

Racing Mates host various events, often including barbecues at racecourses, to foster connection, reduce stigma around mental health, and promote open conversation in a relaxed environment.



Referral Pathways

The Ambassadors and the program provide crucial links to professional help, including clinical psychologists and confidential helplines, ensuring participants receive qualified support when needed.

What is Mental Health?

Mental health is a state of wellbeing that enables you to deal with what life throws at you.

It is about feeling resilient, enjoying life and being able to connect with others.

Good mental health helps you :

- 01 Cope with the normal stresses of life
- 02 Be productive both at work and in your private life
- 03 Relate well to other people
- 04 Contribute to your community.

How mental health affects us

Your mental health affects how you think, feel and act.

It influences how you handle stress, how you relate to people, and how you see yourself and the world around you.

It shapes the choices you make throughout the course of your life, and has an impact on your work, relationships, and even physical health.

There are many types of mental health conditions and disorders.

The most common forms are:

Anxiety

**Affective disorders,
including depression**

**Substance use disorders,
including alcohol and drug use**

Each condition:

- **Has a variety of symptoms**
- **Can be short-term or long-term**
- **Can affect people in different ways – some have mild symptoms, while others have severe symptoms that can lead to harm to themselves or others.**
- **With the right support, you can manage and improve mental ill-health & maintain your hmental health.**

Mental health through life

Your mental health can change as you go through various stages in your life, and many factors can contribute.

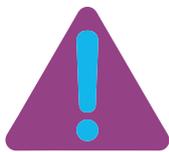


Mental Health in Australian Society



Prevalence is high

Approximately 1 in 5 Australians will experience a mental illness in a 12-month period, and about 45% may experience a mental illness at some point in their lives.



Youth are a high-risk group

The prevalence of mental illness is highest among young adults (18–24 years old), and over 75% of mental health issues occur before the age of 25.



Treatment seeking is increasing, but still limited

The proportion of Australians seeing a mental health professional has more than doubled from 2009 to 2021. However, over half of people with mental illness still do not access any treatment in a 12-month period.



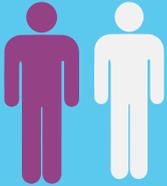
Mental illness is a leading health issue

It is the third leading cause of disability burden in Australia. Depression, specifically, is the number one cause of non-fatal disability in the country.



Suicide is a major concern

Suicide is the leading cause of death for Australians aged 25-44 and the second leading cause for young people aged 15-24. Men are at greatest risk of death by suicide but are less likely to seek help.



42.9%, or nearly 1 in 2, of people aged 16–85 years had experienced a mental disorder at some time in their life.

Australian Bureau of Statistics

21.5% of people had a 12-month mental disorder, with Anxiety being the most common group (17.2% of people aged 16–85 years)

Australian Bureau of Statistics

38.8% of people aged 16–24 years had a 12-month mental disorder



Rural Challenges

Living in rural Australia can be tough for the general community because accessing help can sometimes be challenging.

People living in rural and remote areas can face stress from isolation, limited access to health care, money problems and natural disasters which can all affect mental health. Where isolation is a factor, engagement can be challenging.



Mental Health in Racing

The Thoroughbred racing industry has its unique pressures and challenges.

High-Stress Environment:

The racing industry involves intense workloads, irregular hours, financial uncertainty, and constant travel. Jockeys, trainers and stable staff face relentless performance expectations, often tying personal worth to race outcomes. This can lead to stress, anxiety, and burnout.

Isolation and Stigma:

Many in racing, especially in regional areas, work in small teams or alone, leading to social isolation. The industry's "tough it out" culture historically discouraged discussing mental health, leaving issues like depression or substance abuse unaddressed.

Mental Health Facts v Fiction

Fiction

Only certain types of people develop a mental illness.

Mental health conditions are a sign of weakness; people should just 'snap out of it'.

People with a mental illness are violent or dangerous.

Medication is the only answer for treatment.

Mental illness is an incurable, lifelong sentence.

Fact

Anyone can develop a mental illness, regardless of age, income, education, or culture. Biological, social, and environmental factors all play a part.

Mental illness has nothing to do with weakness or a lack of willpower; it is an actual health condition that requires a recovery process, much like a physical illness.

The vast majority of individuals with mental health issues are not violent. In fact, they are more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators.

Medication is appropriate in some cases, but a combination of medication and therapy is often most effective for long-term benefits.

Recovery is possible, and many people successfully manage their conditions and live full, productive lives with appropriate treatment and support.



Common Mental Health Illnesses

In Australia, the most common mental health illnesses are Anxiety Disorders, followed by Depressive Disorders (Affective Disorders) and Substance Use Disorders, affecting millions of adults annually, with anxiety being the most prevalent, impacting around 17% of the population in recent years. Other significant conditions include eating disorders, autism spectrum disorders, and psychotic disorders, with high prevalence in both children and adults, though specific rates vary by age and gender.

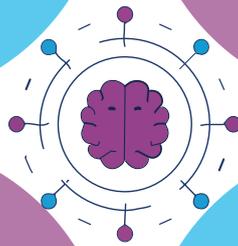


Most Common in Adults

- **Anxiety Disorders:** The most common, affecting over 3 million people (around 17% of the population), including social phobia, PTSD, and panic disorders.
- **Depressive Disorders (Affective Disorders):** Affecting about 1.5 million people (around 8%), such as major depressive episodes.
- **Substance Use Disorders:** Affecting around 3-3.3% of Australians.

Common in Children & Adolescents (4-17 years):

- **Anxiety Disorders:** High prevalence, with almost 14% of young people experiencing a mental illness.
- **Conduct Disorder & ADHD:** Common behavioral disorders in this age group.



Other Significant Mental Health Conditions in Australia:

- **Eating Disorders:** More prevalent in young females but affect all genders.
- **Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD):** A significant contributor to the overall mental health burden.
- **Psychotic Disorders:** Including schizophrenia.

Key Statistics:

- Nearly half of all Australians (around 43%) will experience a mental disorder at some point in their lives.
- Anxiety disorders contribute the most to the burden of disease for both males and females.

Talking About Mental Health

Talk to Someone You Know

If you are concerned about a friend, family member, or colleague, several Australian mental health bodies suggest a supportive, non-judgmental approach focused on listening and encouraging action.

Do's and Don'ts of a Mental Health Conversation:

Do's

- **DO** find a private and comfortable place to talk where you won't be rushed or interrupted.
- **DO** start by mentioning specific changes in behavior that have made you concerned, using "I" statements (e.g., "I've noticed you've been quiet lately").
- **DO** listen without judgment and validate their feelings. Use open-ended questions like "How are you feeling about that?".
- **DO** show empathy and patience. It's okay to sit in silence and give them space to think and talk at their own pace.
- **DO** encourage them to seek professional help and offer to assist them in finding resources or attending an appointment.

Don'ts

- **DON'T** try to "fix" their problems or offer simple solutions like "snap out of it".
- **DON'T** make the conversation about your own experiences or compare their struggles to yours.
- **DON'T** break their trust (unless there is an immediate risk of harm to themselves or others, in which case you should call Triple Zero (000)).
- **DON'T** use stigmatising or derogatory language (e.g., "crazy", "psycho").

How To Seek Help

When to Seek Professional Help

Self-help strategies are excellent for maintaining wellbeing and managing mild to moderate symptoms, but they are not a substitute for professional care if you are struggling significantly.

If your low mood or anxiety is affecting your day-to-day life and doesn't improve, speak to a GP (General Practitioner).

They can provide advice, a diagnosis, and a Mental Health Treatment Plan. Professional clinical psychologist services are also available through the Racing NSW and Racing Mates Welfare Program.

Reach out to an ambassador at www.racingmates.com.au for further information.

**IN AN IMMEDIATE LIFE-THREATENING
EMERGENCY CALL 000**



**IF YOU ARE IN A CRISIS OR HAVING THOUGHTS
OF SUICIDE, CALL LIFELINE 13 11 14**

**OR THE SUICIDE CALL BACK SERVICE
1300 659 467**

Workplace Responsibilities

Bullying and Harassment Policies

The core principles of the Racing NSW approach to bullying and harassment are outlined in various memorandums and information booklets available on the website at <https://www.racingsw.com.au/rules-policies-whs/work-health-safety-whs/harassment/>

Reporting and Support

Racing NSW encourages anyone with concerns regarding adverse conduct to report it. Information can be shared with Racing NSW directly or other external bodies.

Racing NSW



02 9551 7500

Safe Work NSW



13 10 50

NSW Anti-Discrimination Board



1800 670 812

Australian Human Rights Commission



02 9284 9600

A Zero Tolerance

Harassment, sexual harassment, bullying, and discrimination are unacceptable, unlawful forms of behaviour and are not tolerated in the Racing Industry.

Safe Environment

The industry aims to ensure the workplace and racing environment are free from these behaviours to maintain a safe, harmonious, respectful, and inclusive culture.

Definition of Bullying

The Australian Rules of Racing define “bullying” as repeatedly acting unreasonably towards a person, which behaviour creates a risk to health and safety (victimising, humiliating, intimidating, or threatening). Reasonable management action carried out in a reasonable way does not constitute bullying.

Consultation and Prevention

Employers are expected to implement preventative measures, have clear policies, and consult with employees to identify and address risks.

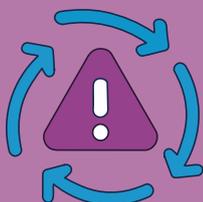
Consequences

Disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal or expulsion from the Racing Industry, may be taken against those who breach the policy. Making malicious, frivolous, or vexatious complaints may also lead to disciplinary action.

Employer Responsibilities

Employers (or a “person conducting a business or undertaking” (PCBU) have a primary legal duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the physical and psychological health and safety of their workers. This involves a proactive risk management approach.

Manage Psychosocial Hazards



Employers must identify and manage psychosocial hazards (e.g., high job demands, poor support, bullying, harassment, lack of role clarity, or poor change management) that could cause psychological or physical harm.

Racing NSW has a clear policy framework that prohibits bullying, harassment, and discrimination within the NSW Racing Industry, reminding all employees and licensed persons that such behaviour is unlawful and will not be tolerated.

Eliminate or Minimise Risks



Employers must eliminate psychosocial risks where reasonably practicable. If not, they must minimise them as far as is reasonably practicable by implementing control measures (e.g., redesigning work processes or improving communication).

Consult with Workers

Employers must consult with employees and their representatives when identifying hazards, assessing risks, and deciding on control measures.

Provide Information and Training

Employers need to provide necessary information, training, instruction, and supervision to protect everyone from health and safety risks.

Prevent Discrimination

Employers are legally prohibited from discriminating against a worker because of a mental health condition under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992.

Provide Reasonable Adjustments

If a worker is experiencing mental ill-health, employers must make reasonable adjustments to the job or workplace (e.g., flexible hours, a mentor, or different work tasks) to help them perform their duties, as long as it doesn't cause unjustifiable hardship to the business.

Respect Privacy

Personal or health information about an employee's mental health must be kept confidential unless the employee consents to disclosure or it is required by law.



Employee Responsibilities

Employees also have an important role in fostering a mentally healthy workplace and have legal obligations to:

- 01 Take Reasonable Care:** Take reasonable care for their own health and safety, and ensure their actions do not adversely affect the health and safety of others.
- 02 Comply with Instructions:** Cooperate with any reasonable health and safety instructions, policies, or procedures provided by their employer.
- 03 Report Hazards and Concerns:** Report any injuries, unsafe situations, or mental health concerns to their supervisor or health and safety representative.
- 04 Note on Disclosure:** Employees are not legally required to disclose a mental health condition if it does not affect their ability to perform the essential requirements of their job safely. However, if the condition poses a health and safety risk to themselves or others, they have an obligation to report it.

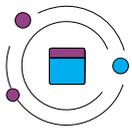


Workplace Mental Health Discussions

Having discussions about mental health in the Australian workplace requires empathy, a non-judgmental approach, and a focus on support and solutions rather than performance management.

If you are an Employee

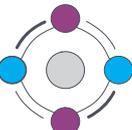
If you are struggling with your mental health and want to talk to your employer or manager:



Plan the conversation: Think about what you want to say, how your mental health is affecting your work, and what specific support (reasonable adjustments) might help, such as flexible hours or time off for appointments.



Choose the right time and place: Ask for a private meeting at a convenient time for both of you, or suggest an informal setting like going for a walk or coffee. Giving your manager a heads-up about the general topic allows them to prepare as well.



Share what you are comfortable with: You only need to disclose what is necessary to get the right support. You do not have to share specific medical details.



Involve others if needed: You can ask a trusted colleague, an HR representative, or an advocate to join the meeting for support.



Keep the conversation ongoing: This shouldn't be a one-off chat. Schedule regular check-ins to monitor progress and adjust support as needed.



Know your rights: Familiarise yourself with your workplace's policies on mental health and available resources like the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).



Focus on solutions: Be prepared with suggestions for adjustments that could improve your situation. For example: "I think having flexible start times a couple of days a week would help me manage my symptoms and be more productive".

If you are a Manager/Employer

When initiating a conversation with an employee you are concerned about:



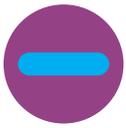
Create a safe, private space: Ensure the discussion happens in a confidential setting free from interruptions.



Lead with care and concern: Start the conversation by expressing genuine concern and mentioning specific, observable changes in their behaviour or work patterns. For example: “I’ve noticed you’ve been quiet lately and have missed some deadlines; are things okay?”.



Listen actively and non-judgmentally: Give the employee your full attention, use open-ended questions (“How are you feeling about that?”), and validate their feelings.



Avoid “fixing” or making assumptions: Your role is to listen and offer support, not to diagnose or provide immediate solutions. Instead, focus on understanding their perspective.



Collaborate on a plan: Work with the employee to develop an action plan that may involve reasonable adjustments to their workload, hours, or environment.



Emphasise confidentiality: Reassure the employee that their information will be kept confidential, while being transparent about any situations where you may be required to share information (e.g., immediate safety risk).



Refer to professional resources: Encourage the employee to seek professional help from their GP, an EAP counsellor, or external services like a Racing Mates Counsellor, or, other services available through Beyond Blue or Lifeline.



Follow up: Arrange a time for a follow-up meeting to check on their progress and ensure the agreed-upon supports are working effectively.

By fostering a culture of understanding and providing appropriate tools and support, workplaces can make mental health discussions easier and more effective for everyone.

Maintaining Wellness

Key Self-Help Strategies

Australian health organisations recommend integrating a range of activities into your daily life to maintain and improve mental wellbeing.

Physical Activity

Regular exercise, such as walking, swimming, or dancing, helps boost mood, improve sleep, and reduce stress and anxiety.

Healthy Routine

Maintain a regular schedule for sleeping and waking, eat a balanced diet, and stay hydrated. A healthy routine can help manage stress and provide a sense of control.

Social Connections

Stay connected with supportive friends and family. Strong relationships build a sense of belonging and provide emotional support. You can also join online peer support communities or local social groups.



**Mindfulness
and
Relaxation**

Pay attention to the present moment through practices like meditation or deep breathing exercises. This can help you manage difficult feelings and reduce stress.

**Meaningful
Activities**

Dedicate time to hobbies or activities you enjoy or that give you a sense of accomplishment. This could be anything from cooking to DIY projects or volunteering.

**Healthy
Thinking**

Practice self-compassion and challenge negative thoughts. Journaling your thoughts can help you understand your feelings more clearly.

Goal Setting

Set realistic, short-term goals to keep you motivated and provide a sense of purpose.

By integrating these small, consistent actions into your life, you can strengthen your psychological well-being and improve your quality of life.

Emergency Contacts

If you or a colleague is in crisis and requires immediate action, call emergency services on Triple Zero (000). Alternatively, you can contact a doctor, a local mental health crisis service, or present to your nearest hospital emergency department.

Emergency contact information - 24 hours

If you or someone you know needs help, call:

Emergency



000 (112 on mobile phone)

 **Lifeline**



**Call 13 11 14
or text
0477 13 11 14**

Kids Helpline



1800 551 800

Mensline Australia



1300 789 978

Suicide Call Back Service



1300 659 467

Racing Mates Website

The Racing Mates website, found at racingmates.com.au, serves as a central hub for mental health resources and support tailored to the racing industry.

01

Helplines and Contact Information: Direct links and phone numbers for crisis support services like Lifeline and Beyond Blue, as well as the contact details for Racing Mates ambassadors.

02

Information and Tools: Useful information and strategies for maintaining mental wellness, such as the importance of physical activity, healthy eating, and healthy thinking patterns.

03

Guidance on Starting Conversations: Resources and tips on how to talk to a “mate” who might be struggling, encouraging people to reach out rather than “going it alone”.

04

News and Events: Information on upcoming awareness events and initiatives within the NSW racing community.

The website is a vital resource designed to be easily accessible and provide valuable, confidential information for anyone in the racing industry doing it tough.





'Let's Talk'

racingmates.com.au