

# MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

Wellington Young Lawyer's Committee

There are many risk factors for mental health that may be present in the working environment. These risks can have a substantial adverse impact on mental health. Inadequate support for employees and long and inflexible working hours with unreasonable workloads often occur in legal workplaces. Lack of control over workloads and internal conflicts with work and personal values might also contribute to this.

**A note for young lawyers** – You may use sick leave for mental health related reasons.

## Getting Help

If you are struggling with your mental health, it is okay to seek help. Many lawyers seek and obtain treatment for mental health issues without impacting their effectiveness in their role.

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### Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)

Many firms have in place an EAP programme which allows staff to access free and confidential mental health services. If your firm does not provide any EAP services, the Law Society offers a Legal Community Counselling Service. More information on this can be found [here](#).

### Talk to your GP

Your GP is a starting point for addressing mental health as well as physical. They can help you get referred to the appropriate services for you.

### The National Friends Panel

The National Friends Panel provides for support and practice advice between legal professionals. Details of this can be found [here](#).

### Other Resources

[Mental health services – where to get help | MOH NZ](#)

[Resources – Changing Minds](#)

[Kiwis Need Mental Wellbeing More Than Ever](#)

[www.depression.org.nz](http://www.depression.org.nz)

[www.lawsociety.org.nz/practice-resources/practising-well](http://www.lawsociety.org.nz/practice-resources/practising-well)

[Woebot or Mentemia app](#)

## Common Mental Health Issues from work

### Anxiety

Anxiety disorders differ from normal feelings of nervousness or anxiousness, and involve excessive fear or anxiety.

### Stress

Stress is the feeling of being overwhelmed or unable to cope with mental or emotional pressure.

### Fatigue and burnout

Fatigue and burnout are both states of mental and physical exhaustion. Both make it challenging for people to cope with stress and handle day-to-day responsibilities.

### Depression

Depression is a mental illness where your mood is persistently low and you experience a loss of enjoyment in activities that you normally enjoy, for a sustained period of time.

## Legal requirements

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act, workplaces have a legal responsibility to manage risks to mental health just like they do any other health and safety risk.

Businesses must take reasonably practicable steps to protect health and prevent harm at work, including psychological harm. They have a legal responsibility to adapt the way they organise things at work to help people who experience mental distress.

If you feel comfortable you should start a dialogue around mental health within your workplace and what your workplace is doing to protect its employee's mental health.