

Executive summary

Throughout the OECD, there is growing recognition that mental health is a major issue for social and labour market policies. Mental illness exacts a heavy price on people, employers, and the economy at large, affecting wellbeing and employment, and causing substantial productivity losses.

Policy thinking in Australia shows well advanced awareness both of the costs of mental illness for society as a whole and of the mental health benefits of employment. Both government and non-government bodies organise awareness-raising initiatives, invest in promoting mental health among pupils in schools, seek to improve access to mental health care among people with mild-to-moderate mental disorders, and provide employment services to reactivate people with mental health problems who lost their job.

However, the fragmented nature of policy initiatives and the lack of continuity in government funding hinder the country's ability to improve labour market and social outcomes among workers who suffer from mental ill-health. A more structured approach is required to: make employment issues a concern of the health care services; help young people succeed in their future working lives; make the workplace a safe, supportive psychosocial environment; and better design and target employment services for jobseekers with mental ill-health.

In this context, the main OECD recommendations to Australian policy makers are as follows:

- Develop employment-oriented mental health care and explore ways to integrate health and employment services.
- Create a coherent nationwide support structure to act upon early school leaving and support young people with mental health problems in their transition into work.
- Strengthen the role and responsibility of employers in sickness management and be proactive in offering employees occupational health services, regardless of the work-relatedness of workers' mental health issues.
- Ensure better long-term employment outcomes for jobseekers by improving early identification of mental health problems, investing in appropriate services for all jobseekers with mental ill-health and encouraging post-placement support.