

## Highlights

- *Close to one in three (26%) employers are likely to hire a person who has a known mental illness. Just over one in three (36%) are on the fence and over one in three (38%) are unlikely to employ a person who has a mental illness*
- *Gen Y has become less likely to hire someone who has mental illness, but Gen X (30%) and Gen Y (32%) are significantly more open than Baby Boomers (17%)*
- *Stigmatised views – that people can't do the job, won't fit in, will be unreliable, unsafe and unpredictable – are still considered a barrier, but the perceptions don't match reality. In fact, 63% of SMEs that have employed someone who has a mental illness described the experience as positive or very positive*
- *Approximately 1 in 10 SMEs reported a negative experience hiring a person who has a mental illness which is comparable to hiring anyone from any background*
- *Close to one in three (28%) of SMEs have ever hired a person who has a known mental illness. Close to two thirds (68%) of employers still do*
- *63% of SMEs reported a positive experience when employing a person who has a mental illness because they were good for the company, hard-working and fitted in well with the team*
- *A strong predictor for an employer hiring someone who has a known mental illness is whether or not they have done it in the past*
- *34% of all managers have a friend, or someone close to them who has a mental illness and 26% have a member of their family who has a mental illness*



## SMEs attitudes to employing people who have a mental illness

### Introduction

WISE Employment commissioned McNair Ingenuity Research to conduct a national study with small to medium enterprises (SMEs) to gauge their attitudes towards employing people who have a mental illness and their readiness to do so.

The SME Readiness to Employ People with a Mental Illness Report (2014) consisted of 256 online surveys with CEOs, GMs and other managers, from a range of industries, involved in making decisions about employing new staff.

### Perceived employer barriers to hiring a person who has a mental illness

Just under 3 in 5 (57%) SMEs weren't inclined to hire people who have a mental illness, believing their behaviour would be unpredictable and changeable; this contradicts the positive experiences of those employers who have. Employers felt they needed to educate their staff on mental illness, which posed another barrier to hiring people who have a mental illness.

#### Other reasons:

- 37% of employers felt people who have a mental illness wouldn't be suited to the type of work their organisation does
- 42% of SMEs had never been approached by anyone asking them to consider employing a person who has a mental illness; and 22% felt there wasn't enough support available and they didn't have the resources available to them if they chose to employ a person who has a mental illness
- Mental illness was seen as bigger barrier to employment than physical disability. Close to one in three (29%) would consider employing a person who has a mental illness compared to close to one in two (50%) for someone who has a physical disability. Employers felt it was more possible to "work around physical disability" and that it was not seen to affect motivation or personality, unlike mental illness

### Perceptions don't match reality

The majority of employers that had employed someone who has a known mental illness found the experience positive or very positive, citing their employee was hard working and fitted in well with the team. Just over 1 in 10 employers reported a negative experience which is comparable to hiring anyone from any background.

#### Other experiences:

- Of the organisations that had a positive experience in employing people who have a mental illness, 78% said they fitted in well with the team (up from 57% in 2013), 67% were hardworking and 53% were good for the company.
- 68% of employers who have ever employed a person who has a mental illness still do
- Just over one in four (27%) organisations had a policy regarding the employment of people who have a disability
- For SMEs that had employed people who had a mental illness, the types of mental illness were depression (62%), anxiety (52%), bi polar (41%), personality disorder (24%) and schizophrenia (7%).

### Awareness and support - employers may rethink their position

An influential factor that positively affects the likelihood of SMEs to consider employing people who have a mental illness was whether they had already done so in the past; those that had were more likely to consider it again in the future.

Of the 38% of employers who were unlikely or very unlikely to employ someone who has a mental illness would consider hiring if they:

- knew the employee is likely to be loyal and has a long term commitment to the organisation (33%)
- had ongoing support from an employment service provider (33%)
- had a "no strings attached trial period" with the employee (37%).

### Summary

With one in five Australians affected by mental illness in any given year<sup>1</sup>, this research highlights how many Australian workers can be impacted by the misconceptions, fear or stigma on mental illness.

WISE commissioned McNair to conduct this national study over three years. Overall, the wave of 2014 research has shown a decline in willingness by SMEs to hire someone with a mental illness. Whilst reasons cited included "unreliability" and "won't fit in with the company", it appears that the increasing resistance to hiring a person who has a mental illness is less the outcome of concern regarding a candidate's inability to perform a job but rather the fear that something could go wrong. SMEs that had hired people who have a mental illness found the experience positive or very positive.

Employing a person who has a mental illness can benefit the individual and the employer. With appropriate treatment and support they can be loyal and productive staff, offer much needed skills, boost morale by demonstrating to other employees their employer cares for its staff, which can lead to increased employee engagement and loyalty to the employer. A person who has a mental illness can be the best person for the job.

For enquiries regarding the research please contact Anastasia Kailis , 0409 349 179.

### A person with a mental illness can be the best person for the job

<sup>1</sup> National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing: Summary of Results, 2007



### Ongoing support from not-for-profit employment services provider - WISE Employment

WISE Employment helps employers with a variety of supports and incentives to enable the employment of people who have a mental illness. Including job design and matching services, on site visits and organising mental illness awareness training for co-workers. We can also help employers access federally funded wage subsidies to assist them to employ a person who has a mental illness. Our services are cost-free and support is provided for as long as it is needed.

Visit [wiseemployment.com.au](http://wiseemployment.com.au) for more information, to lodge a job vacancy or call **1800 685 105** to speak with a WISE representative.