



UNDER STRICT EMBARGO: Tuesday 7 October 2014, 12:01am

Mental illness in the workplace: 'fear factor' does no favours for business

One in five Australians are potentially being overlooked for job opportunities due to the fear factor in hiring people who have a mental illness.

The **Empowermental** research report, released today by WISE Employment explores the attitudes of 256 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) across Australia towards hiring disadvantaged people including those who have a mental illness.

The research found that two in five employers would not consider employing someone who has a mental illness citing unpredictable and changeable behaviour (57%), possibility of a breakdown (54%) and too many sick days (43%) as the biggest barriers.

Employers prioritised hiring job seekers without any TAFE or tertiary experience (66%), who are learning English as a second language (43%) or who have a physical disability (50%) over hiring someone who has a mental illness (29%), even if they were qualified for the job.

These stigmatised views remain relatively unchanged from the first **Empowermental** research report in 2012, and holding onto them isn't doing Australian businesses any favours, says Matt Lambelle, CEO of WISE Employment.

"Sadly, many employers still hold inaccurate fears and perceptions of mental illness which affects one in five Australians. If employers remain uneducated about mental health and fear hiring people who have a mental illness, they're missing out on a huge pool of untapped skill and talent."

"The majority of employers who have hired someone with a known mental illness described the experience as positive or very positive. By sharing their stories we want to help employers shake off misinformed perceptions so they can start to see a job seeker who has a mental illness can be the best person for the job."

The bright side of the research showed six in ten employers (63%) who have taken the step of hiring someone who has a mental illness reported positive results stated: the employee fitted in well with the team (78%), was hardworking (67%) and was good for the company (53%).

The Empowermental research report, commissioned by McNair Research, forms part of WISE Employment's three year campaign to break down stigma and encourage Australian businesses to consider employing people who have mental illness.

ENDS

For further information or for an interview with WISE Employment CEO Matt Lambelle call: Megan Woithe: megan@isleoflime.com.au / 0429 570 668





Lina Cabai: lina@isleoflime.com.au / 0412 506 080

Key Research Findings

- Two in five employers would not consider employing someone who has a mental illness citing unpredictable and changeable behaviour (57%), possibility of a breakdown (54%) and too many sick days (43%) as the biggest barriers.
- Employers prioritised hiring job seekers without any TAFE or tertiary experience (66%), who are learning English as a second language (43%) or who have a physical disability (50%) over hiring someone who has a mental illness (29%), even if they were qualified for the job.
- 50% of employers would prefer to hire 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.
- Of the organisations that had a positive experience in employing people with 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 employed a person who has a mental illness still do.
- 34% of all managers have a friend or someone close to them with a mental illness and 26% have a member of their family who has a mental illness.
- 26% of employers would consider hiring a person who has a known mental illness.
- 42% of SMEs had never been approached by anyone asking them to consider employing a person with a mental illness.
- 22% had a lack of awareness of the support and resources available to them if they chose to employ a person with a mental illness.

About WISE

WISE Employment is a not for profit employment services provider that helps and encourages employers to hire job seekers from disadvantaged backgrounds, including people who have a mental illness.

WISE provides a variety of supports and incentives to employers such as job design and matching services, on site visits and organising mental illness awareness training for co-workers. WISE also helps employers access federally funded wage subsidies to assist them to employ a person who has a mental illness. WISE services are cost-free and support is provided for as long as it is needed.



WISE Employment Ltd
ABN 68 093 718 766
552 Victoria Street, North Melbourne VIC 3051
P: 03 8329 8800 F: 03 8329 8801 E: enquiries@wiseemployment.com.au
www.wiseemployment.com.au