



# Job Control Toolkit



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The resource was created in collaboration with Black Dog Institute, as part of the Thriving in Health project. The Thriving in Health project is supported by WorkSafe's WorkWell Mental Health Improvement Fund. The information in this resource is not intended as a substitute for workplace specific health and safety measures. Information contained in this resource was considered best practice as at March 2023.

# The Thriving in Health Job Control Strategy

In 2019 Peninsula Health received funding through WorkSafe Victoria's WorkWell Mental Health Improvement Fund to lead the Thriving in Health project on behalf of a consortium of Victorian health services. The Thriving in Health project aims to protect and promote healthcare worker mental health and wellbeing by addressing factors in the design or management of work that can increase the risk of mental illness and injury if left unmanaged. This toolkit was developed as part of the Job Control Strategy, in collaboration with the Black Dog Institute.

This strategy aimed to improve the mental health of nurses by targeting job control through online facilitated skills training.

## Mental health and the workplace

### WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

Mental health is defined as 'a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to her or his community', (World Health Organisation, 2010).

Mental illness is different to mental health. A mental illness impacts how a person feels, thinks, and behaves. There are different types of mental illness including depression, anxiety and bipolar disorder which can range in varying degrees of severity.

Achieving and maintaining good mental health and wellbeing is important for everyone.

### PROMOTING A MENTALLY HEALTHY WORKPLACE

Mental illness is one of the leading causes of sickness absence and long-term work incapacity in Australia and is one of the main health-related reasons for reduced work performance. It is estimated that, at any point in time, one in six Australian workers will be experiencing mental ill-health. A further one-sixth of the population will be experiencing symptoms associated with mental illness, such as stress and fatigue, which will affect their ability to function at work.

Research shows that absenteeism, reduced work performance, increased turnover rates and compensation claims as a result of mental illness cost Australian businesses up to \$12 billion each year.

Employers and workplaces can play an active and significant role in supporting the health and wellbeing of their workers as well as assisting in recovery from mental illness. Investing in the mental health of staff can have a return on investment of \$2.30 in benefits to the organisation<sup>1</sup>. So, creating a mentally healthy workplace has many benefits for both employers and employees. From an organisational perspective, promoting mental health in the workplace can increase productivity and employee engagement. For the individual, it means a healthy, balanced life and psychological wellbeing.

Increasing knowledge and understanding of mental illness is the first step to reducing stigma in the workplace. In addition, developing skills to support mental health in the workplace can lead to improvements in worker wellbeing. Throughout this toolkit we have provided a range of information and resources to help you create a mentally healthier workplace by working on job control.

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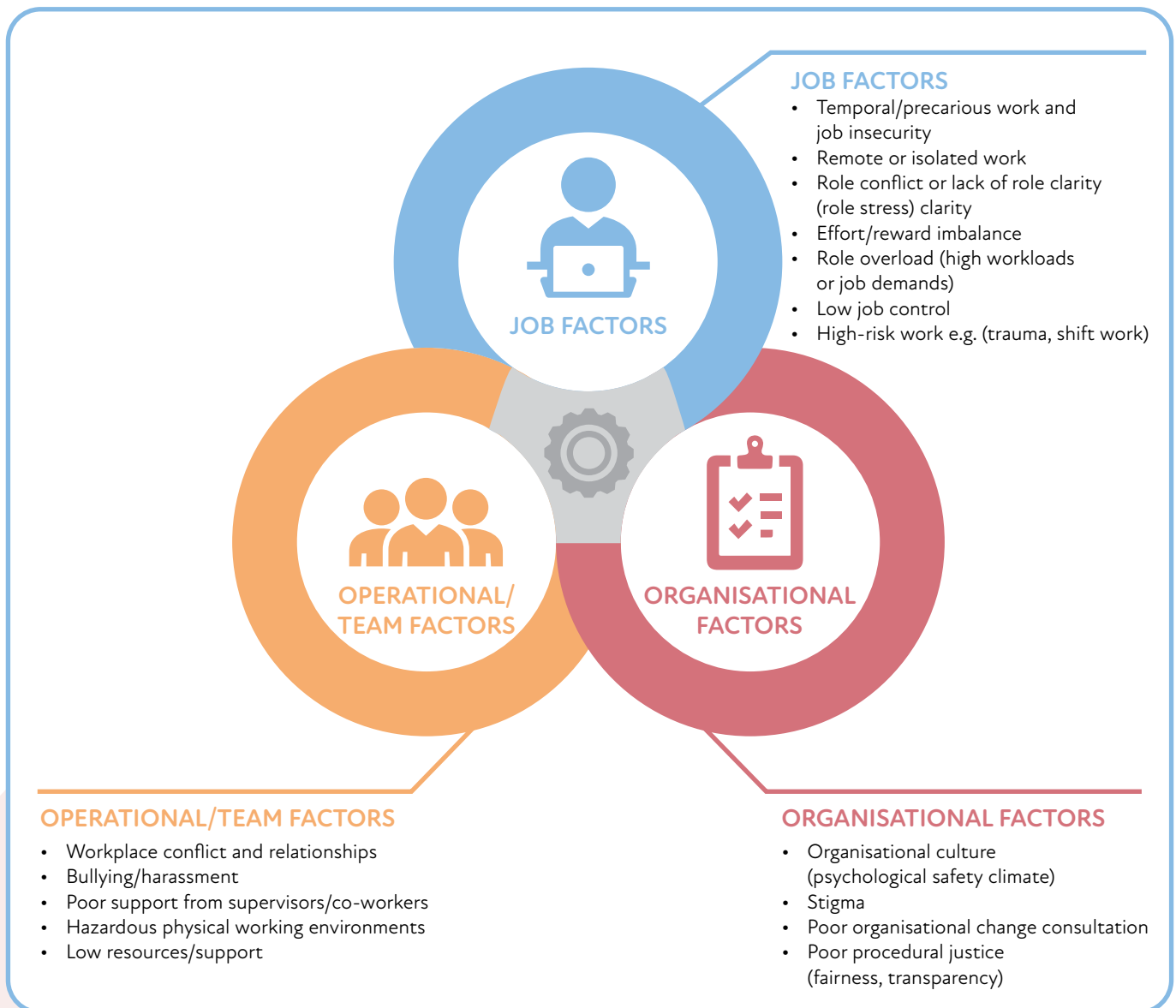
1. Beyond Blue, 2014

# Links between work and mental health

Work can provide an individual with many benefits for their mental health. But for some, the development and persistence of mental ill-health might, in part, be precipitated by characteristics of the workplace.

There are a number of work-related mental health risk factors that if not addressed can impact on the mental health and wellbeing of staff.

As illustrated in this figure,<sup>2</sup> the factors can be grouped into three categories: organisational level factors, factors that relate to operations or the team, and job factors.



While you can't predict how individuals in your team will fare over time, knowledge and understanding of how the work-related risk factors impact your workplace will help you identify how individuals may be impacted. Importantly, most of these risk factors are modifiable, so with the implementation of appropriate changes by individuals and managers, their impact can be reduced.

2. Harvey et al. 2021. 'Modern work: how changes to the way we work are impacting Australians' mental health.'

# Job control

Job control is a work-related mental health factor that relates to the level of discretion an employee has over how they meet the demands of their job. A lack of perceived control in the workplace is one of the most important predictors of workplace stress and when low job control is coupled with high job demands, employees are at increased risk of common mental disorders.

For healthcare workers who are exposed to high levels of job demands, increasing job control is an avenue through which the negative impacts of the high job demands can be mitigated. This may benefit the mental health of the nursing staff and in turn have positive outcomes on patient care.

## ROLE OF LEADERS

Managers and leaders play an important role in the mental health and wellbeing of the staff they supervise. They are in a position to make certain modifications to work-related mental health risk factors to minimise the impact these can have on staff. Managers also have a responsibility under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* (OHS Act) to prevent harm to the health and safety of their team by eliminating or reducing risks where possible.

The following evidence-informed resources can help managers and leaders conceptualise job control in the workplace and determine what can be done to increase the level of control staff have in their day-to-day tasks.



# Conceptualising job control in the workplace

## HOWSE

Understanding how and which aspect of job control needs to be improved is best approached as a collaborative process between staff, manager and the organisation. This process can help determine what you and your team have more control over and how to attain it.

**The four domains that make up a workers' HOWSE can help you and your team determine what and where systems can be put in place to give staff more control:**



### 1. **HOW WORK IS PERFORMED** **within the team and workplace.**

- control over work methods
- support from supervisors and peers
- acknowledgement and recognition
- reasonable adjustments
- social activities.



### 2. **WHEN AND WHERE** **work is performed.**

- shift times, rotation and deployment
- ward, operating theatre, emergency department
- community
- office
- allocated time for wellbeing activities.



### 3. **SKILLS** **needed to perform the work.**

- opportunities to utilise skills, strengths, experience, and enjoyment
- tackling challenges for growth
- career development.



### 4. **EXERCISE DISCRETION** **IN DECISION MAKING** **when undertaking the work.**

- ability to make decisions about the way you work
- be involved in problem-solving
- two-way communication.

# Applying HOWSE

## AS A TEAM, WORK TOGETHER TO IDENTIFY ASPECTS OF JOB CONTROL THAT CAN BE IMPROVED.



The following prompts can be used in discussion with your team:

- What are some of the biggest challenges in your current role?
- What areas/challenges could be modified so you have more control over them?
- What are some current opportunities or existing resources that you can utilise to improve control in this area?
- What could management do/implement to improve your level of control in this area?

## WHEN HAVING THESE DISCUSSIONS, REMEMBER TO:



- be open and listen to what your team members have to say.
- acknowledge system constraints.
- use HoWSE to identify areas for opportunity.
- work together to set achievable goals.
- check back - this is part of an ongoing conversation and collaborative process with your team members.

# The CTRL process

The CTRL process can be applied by leaders and their teams to easily identify issues, gather support and plan for change to improve job control.

HOWSE will inform the first stage of the CTRL process of clarifying what areas of job control need attention for an individual worker or a team of workers.

Once this is established, the remaining three stages of CTRL can be addressed.



Use the **HOWSE** acronym to help **CLARIFY** what job control is. Identify what areas of **HOWSE** can be targeted. This might be an at individual or team level.



Identify and **TRIAGE** the changes needed to make improvements to enhance job control.



Keep track and **REVIEW** the changes that have been prioritised.







Communicate progress of the agreed initiative to **LEADERSHIP** and share learnings.

When implementing this process, allocate time, allow fair participation from everyone, listen actively, provide feedback and allow for two-way communication.

Arrange to meet with your leadership team to provide them with an overview of job control, the CTRL process and the information you have gathered from your team members. This will help you in the future if any of the outcomes developed with your team need additional support.

## Undertaking the CTRL process

1. Go through the CTRL process as outlined below.
2. Complete the Action Planning Template as a team (a copy of the Action Planning Template is included in this toolkit).
3. Reconvene as a team to measure progress, reflect on lessons learned.
4. Once an outcome has been achieved, continue with CTRL process to improve job control for other workplace protective factors.

	 <b>1. CLARIFY</b>	 <b>2. TRIAGE</b>	 <b>3. REVIEW</b>	 <b>4. LEADERSHIP</b>
<b>CTRL</b>				
<b>AIM</b>	To promote an understanding of job control within your team, and to have the whole team contribute to defining and describing issues faced in the workplace.	To share decision making on how to approach and prioritise team challenges/issues.	To, measure, keep track of and determine whether you are reaching the intended ideal state.	To communicate progress to leadership, share knowledge with other teams and request support if needed.
<b>ACTIONS</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explain the importance of job control using HOWSE.</li> <li>2. Discuss why improving job control is important.</li> <li>3. Work together to identify what aspects of HOWSE the team has little control over, and what can be improved.</li> <li>4. Gain consensus on the areas of HOWSE the team will target.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify the changes needed, and any barriers and opportunities to facilitating change.</li> <li>2. Specify the activities and resources needed to support change.</li> <li>3. Identify who can take or share responsibility for identified activities.</li> <li>4. Determine a time frame for the change.</li> <li>5. Triage the changes.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Determine the measures of success for your prioritised change.</li> <li>2. Determine when and how you will collect or review these measures.</li> <li>3. Communicate outcomes to the team.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Discuss if further support or resources are needed.</li> <li>2. Use the measures to determine success and share with leadership.</li> </ol>



# CTRL ACTION PLAN

CLARIFY			TRIAGE					REVIEW	LEADERSHIP	
CLARIFY what job control is using the HOWSE acronym. Identify what areas of HOWSE can be targeted.			Identify and TRIAGE the change needed to make improvements.					REVIEW the changes that have been prioritised.	Communicate to LEADERSHIP what the agreed initiative is and if further support or resources are needed.	
HOWSE shared and discussed	Area of HOWSE targeted	Identify the key problem or challenge	Change needed	Barriers and enablers	Resources and Activities	Responsible	Time frame	Success measures	Communicate to leadership	
<b>TIPS</b>	Explain the importance of job control using HOWSE. Consider sharing information on job control before you meet.	Using HOWSE, identify the areas of job control you can improve.	Write problem statements for the areas of HOWSE that need improvement.	Think about prioritising the changes needed with-in the 4-week program period. Make sure the change is actionable.	Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• staff demands and workload</li> <li>• patient care</li> <li>• resources needed or available.</li> </ul>	Identify the resources and activities needed.	Who will be responsible for the activities?	What is a reasonable time frame?	What are the available measures you can use to measure success?	Organise when and what you will communicate to leadership.
<b>EXAMPLE</b>	✓	How work is performed	The ward does not have control over the process for team-wide recognition of excellence. This leads us to only focus on what goes wrong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to highlight team and individual wins</li> <li>• Highlight and share great feedback received from patients, their families and colleagues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Platform for communicating the wins</li> <li>• Time available to incorporate into meetings</li> <li>• Perceived unfairness</li> <li>• Time for someone to enter in the wins and positive feedback</li> <li>✓ Aligns with wellbeing framework</li> <li>✓ Integration with the intranet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop an appreciation form</li> <li>• Engage communications team to help with design and alignment with any organisational guidelines</li> <li>• Work with internal resources, e.g. IT, to make the form accessible and shareable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nurse Y to lead development of key questions and liaise with communications team</li> <li>• Collaboration with IT to assist with set up</li> </ul>	2 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usage data survey – does everyone feel more appreciated?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff morale and sense of appreciation has improved</li> <li>• Possibility of expanding the program</li> <li>• Exploration of other changes</li> </ul>

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**For more information**



**Peninsula  
Health**

[peninsulahealth.org.au](http://peninsulahealth.org.au)



**Thriving in  
Health**

[thrivinginhealth.org.au](http://thrivinginhealth.org.au)



**Black Dog  
Institute**

[blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://blackdoginstitute.org.au)

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[worksafe.vic.gov.au/workwell](http://worksafe.vic.gov.au/workwell)