

Highlights

- *Close to one in three (32%) employers would consider hiring a person who has a known mental illness. One in three (33%) are non committal and just over one in three (35%) are unlikely to employ a person who has a mental illness*
- *Stigmatised views – that people can't do the job, won't fit in, will be unreliable, unsafe and unpredictable - still hold strong, but the perceptions don't match reality. In fact, 74% of SMEs that have employed someone who has a mental illness described the experience as positive or very positive*
- *Main benefits to employing a person cited by 32% of employers surveyed, included a person who has a mental illness can do the job and be good for the company*
- *The strongest predictor for an employer hiring someone with a known mental illness is whether or not they have done it in the past*
- *Mental illness was seen as bigger barrier to employment than having a physical disability. One in three (32%) will consider employing a person who has a mental illness compared to close to one in two (46%) for someone who has a physical disability*
- *68% of employers who have employed a person who has a mental illness still do*
- *45% of all hiring managers have a friend, family member or someone close to them with 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 (2012) consisted of 254 interviews (in-depth interviews, telephone and 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

One in five (21%) 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:

- 32% of employers felt people who have a mental illness wouldn't be suited to the type of work their organisation does
- 53% of SMEs had never been approached by anyone asking them to consider employing a person with a mental illness; and just under a quarter had a lack of awareness of the support and resources available to them if they chose to employ a person with a mental illness
- Mental illness was seen as bigger barrier to employment than physical disability. One in three (32%) would consider employing a person who has a mental illness compared to close to one in two (46%) 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

Almost three in four (74%) SMEs who employed people who have a mental illness found the experience positive or very positive. The most popular joint reasons for hiring a person who has a mental illness were "because they were the best candidate for the job" and "to give someone a chance that might not otherwise get one".

Other experiences:

- Of the organisations that had a positive experience in employing people with a mental illness, 32% said they were good for the company and a positive experience for their staff and organisation and increased the awareness of mental illness.
- 68% of employers who have employed a person who has a mental illness still do
- Almost one in four (23%) 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 (73%), bi-polar (52%), anxiety (45%) and schizophrenia (14%).

Awareness and support

- employers may rethink their position

The single most influential factor positively affecting 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.

Just under half of employers who were unlikely or very unlikely to employ someone with 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 (44%)
- had ongoing support from an employment service provider (44%)
- had a "no strings attached trial period" with the employee (43%)

Summary

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

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 with a mental illness can be the best person for the job.

For media enquiries regarding the research please contact Eleanor Lonergan, 0418 856 682.

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

¹ 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 the organisation of mental illness awareness training for co-workers. We can also help employers access federally funded wage subsidies to assist them to employ a person with a mental illness. Our services are cost-free and support is provided for as long as it is needed.

Visit wiseemployment.com.au for more information, to lodge a job vacancy or call **1300 12 WISE** and speak with a WISE representative.