



Australasian Faculty of Occupational & Environmental Medicine (AFOEM)
Royal Australasian College of Physicians

Australian Consensus Statement on the Health Benefits of Work

At the heart of this consensus statement regarding the health benefits of work is a shared desire to improve the welfare of individuals, families and communities.

Realising the health benefits of work for all Australians requires a paradigm shift in thinking and practice. It necessitates cooperation between many stakeholders, including government, employers, unions, insurance companies, legal practitioners, advocacy groups, and the medical, nursing and allied health professions.

We, the undersigned, commit to working together to encourage and enable Australians to achieve the health and wellbeing benefits of work. We acknowledge the following fundamental principles about the relationship between health and work.

- Work is generally good for health and wellbeing.
- Long term work absence, work disability and unemployment have a negative impact on health and wellbeing.
- Work must be safe so far as is reasonably practicable.
- Work is an effective means of reducing poverty and social exclusion, including that faced by indigenous populations and other currently disadvantaged groups. With appropriate support, many of those who have the potential to work, but are not currently working because of economic or social inequalities, illness or acquired or congenital disability, can access the benefits of work.
- Work practices, workplace culture, work-life balance, injury management programs and relationships within workplaces are key determinates, not only of whether people feel valued and supported in their work roles, but also of individual health, wellbeing and productivity.
- Individuals seeking to enter the workforce for the first time, seeking reemployment or attempting to return to work after a period of injury or illness, face a complex situation with many variables. Good outcomes are more likely when individuals understand the health benefits of work, and are empowered to take responsibility for their own situation.
- Health professionals exert a significant influence on work absence and work disability, particularly in relation to medical sickness certification practices. This influence provides health professionals with many opportunities for patient advocacy, which includes, but is not limited to, recognition of the health benefits of work.

Government, employers, unions, insurance companies, legal practitioners, advocacy groups, and the medical, nursing and allied health professions all have a role to play in promoting the health benefits of work. Through actions appropriate to our various areas of responsibility or activity, we agree to:

- Promote awareness of the health benefits of work;
- Offer support and encouragement to those attempting to access the health benefits of work;
- Encourage employers' continuing support of workers' occupational health; and
- Advocate for continuous improvement in public policy around work and health, in line with the principles articulated above.

Signatories: