



**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.



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Australian signatories as at 11 March 2011

- Association of Self Insured Employers of Queensland
- Australasian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine
- Australasian Faculty of Public Health Medicine
- Australasian Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine
- Australian and New Zealand Society of Occupational Medicine
- Australian Association of Occupational Therapists
- Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine
- Australian Counselling Association
- Australian Federal Police
- Australian Life Underwriters and Claims Association
- Australian Osteopathic Association
- Australian Physiotherapy Association
- Australian Psychological Society
- Australian Rehabilitation Providers Association
- Australian Society of Rehabilitation Counsellors
- Business Council of Australia
- Career Industry Council of Australia
- Comcare
- Medibank Health Solutions
- National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
- Police Association of NSW
- Police Federation of Australia
- Public Health Association of Australia
- Q-comp
- Queensland Department of Justice and Attorney General
- Rio Tinto
- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners
- Royal Australasian College of Physicians
- Royal Australian & New Zealand College of Psychiatrists
- Safety Institute of Australia
- SafeWork Australia
- WorkCover NSW
- WorkCover QLD
- WorkCover South Australia
- WorkSafe Victoria



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**Consensus Statement Background**

Achieving consensus amongst diverse stakeholders is always challenging. In this final iteration of the Consensus Statement, we have striven to ensure that the central message (that work is generally good for health and wellbeing) is clearly conveyed, while also shoring up the broad support necessary to bring this message home to Australian and New Zealand communities. In order to make the Consensus Statement accessible and media-friendly, we have also sought to limit the text to one page.

The College's intent has not been to produce an exhaustive description of the relationship between health and work, but rather to harness the power of consensus to promote an evidence-based message that will improve public health. Thus, we have not been able to incorporate all the feedback received, and there have been some difficult excisions. Nevertheless, we believe that with your support, the Consensus Statement will make a substantial contribution to the health and wellbeing of Australians and New Zealanders by facilitating further discussion regarding the steps required to implement change.

Key changes include:

- A clear articulation of the motivation behind the Consensus Statement, which is “a shared desire to improve the welfare of individuals, families and communities”.
- Acknowledgement that “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.”
- Acknowledgement that “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.”
- Acknowledgement that, for health professionals, patient advocacy “includes, but is not limited to,” awareness of the health benefits of work.
- A simplification of the call to action present in the first iteration of the Consensus Statement, accompanied by an acknowledgement that signatories only agree to take actions relevant to their various areas of responsibility or action.

The Consensus Statement fulfils a recommendation of the College's position statement, Realising the health benefits of work. Realising the health benefits of work presents compelling international and Australasian evidence that work is generally good for health and wellbeing, and that long term work absence, work disability and unemployment generally have a negative impact on health and wellbeing.

Realising the health benefits of work has been endorsed by the Committee of the Presidents of the Medical Colleges, representing:

Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists  
The Australasian College of Dermatologists  
The Australasian College for Emergency Medicine  
The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners  
The Royal Australasian College of Medical Administrators  
College of Intensive Care Medicine of Australia and New Zealand  
The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists  
The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists  
The Royal Australasian College of Physicians  
The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists  
The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists  
Royal Australasian College of Surgeons

**Realising the health benefits of work** is available on the Faculty web page: [please click here.](#)

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