



Supporting a Neurodiverse Workforce

A Mental Health and Well-being Resource and Training Package

Final Report

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Mental Health and Well-being Package

The Supporting a Neurodiverse Workforce: A mental health and well-being resource and training package is designed to support the mental health and well-being of employees on the autism spectrum. It presents current and evidence-based information and strategies about mental health and well-being, with specific information on mental health and autism.

The package is modular, including specific modules for specific mental health and autism awareness support. It serves different functions:

- A quick reference for mental health information and strategies
- An in-depth information source with useful resources
- A full training course that can be used to establish workplace competency in mental health and autism.

The materials were designed with specific end user information for:

- Executives
- Supervisors, managers and leaders
- Mentors and colleagues
- Employees on the autism spectrum.

The training materials situate mental health and well-being within the individual and the environment. This includes:

- Biological: Education on the biological factors that influence well-being and mental health, including:
 - Protective factors (e.g., sleep)
 - Identifying symptomology in oneself or others

- Practical suggestions to support mental-health (e.g., exercise, structured breathing)
- Psychological: Education on psychological factors that influence well-being :
 - Protective factors (e.g., mindfulness)
 - Education in identifying problematic thoughts and assumptions
 - Suitable strategies for the workplace
- Social: Education on the social factors that influence well-being:
 - Protective factors (e.g., social support)
 - Education in what social factors may affect psychological functioning (e.g., loneliness, bullying)
- Environment: Education on the environmental factors that influence well-being:
 - Work stress (e.g., job demand vs resources)
 - Sensory environment

The training component utilises best practice teaching, to guide learning and the demonstration of learning:

- Intended learning outcomes (ILO) for each module
- Constructive alignment between ILOs, course content, and assessment
- Concise targeted information in alignment with ILOs and project goals, but also additional knowledge for those interested

Steering Committee & Expert Feedback

Stakeholder Panel Formed

- A steering committee was formed to provide advice and guidance on the tone, content and structure of the modules. The panel included key stakeholders represented:
 - Employees with lived experience of autism
 - Autism Spectrum Consultants
 - Supervisors/Technical leads
 - Executives
 - HR/Well-being Support
 - Community Groups
- Panel members included
 - Andrew Baird (ANZ); Dr Susan Bruck (Aspect); Kylie Colquhoun (DXC); Adam Easterbrook (DXC); Rhiannon McElroy (ANZ); Stuart Meadley (DXC); Yessica Monroy Moreno; Luca Pavone (DXC-ANZ); Anita Post (DXC); Ainslie Robinson (Aspect); Kirsty Richards (SunPork Solutions); Melinda Spencer (Different Journeys); Meredith Ward (DXC)
- The Steering Committee provided feedback at three key points during the development of the training package.
 - Provide feedback on the initial package structure, including module outline,

proposed content, and intended learning outcomes (16 & 17 February 2019)

- Review the first two modules, Module 2 & 3 (29 & 31 July 2019)
- Review two additional modules, with the aim of each module receiving feedback from at least two members (Jan & Feb 2020)

Clinical Practitioners and Academic Experts

- In addition to a steering committee of key stakeholders, a range of clinical practitioners and academic experts reviewed individual modules to ensure current and accurate content. These included:
 - Mr Daniel Bonnar, BPsych(Hons), MPsych(Clinical), Clinical Psychologist specialising in behavioural sleep medicine
 - Dr Lawrence Fung, MD, PhD, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioural Sciences, Stanford
 - Dr Rachel Jellett, Clinical Psychologist practicing in an autism population
 - Professor Amanda Richdale, Autism researcher and sleep specialist
 - Dr Mirko Uljarević, MD, PhD, ARC Senior Research Fellow
 - Professor Robyn Young, Clinical Psychologist and autism expert

Steering Committee & Expert Feedback

Steering Committee

Overall the feedback from the steering committee was positive in regard to the content and utility of the document. Feedback has been incorporated into the final product where appropriate. Beyond minor and individual changes, feedback tended to be in one of the following categories.

Structure and content

Beyond minor formatting changes, members suggested that rather than a complete module, ADHD was better covered in Module 2 as additional information. Participants wanted additional information on co-occurring characteristics (e.g., theory of mind, executive functioning). The “Creating autism friendly environments” module was suggested to move from Module 10 to become Module 3 and include more diversity and culture information.

Positive autism information

There were some concerns that the information and language used to describe autism did not include enough positive information in the autism focused modules (2 & 3). To address this an autistic researcher was employed to help write and review modules, and monitor tone and language. Effort was made to highlight positives and individual differences in autism presentation, but to also ensure support needs were not downplayed.

Technical language and module length

Some concerns regarding technical language were raised by some committee members. To support this we have edited the document to simplify language where possible, but have also included a glossary for some key terms.

Some committee members raised concerns about module length, but recommendations to reduce length tended to be how to make information

more consumable rather than removing information. Others praised the content amount and depth, “*the information is extensive, but relevant and informative. Please do not reduce*”. These requests tended to come with suggestions that more in depth knowledge was important for their role.

To cater for these different opinions we have made efforts to streamline information, but have also worked to include core and additional information. We have sign posted what information is core information, and what is additional information for those who prefer greater understanding of the issues. We have also included instructions to better highlight what is quick reference information, more in depth knowledge, or content for a training course. We believe this will allow readers to better tailor their own engagement with the materials based on their needs.

Diversity and culture

Committee members more broadly requested greater emphasis on diversity, including neurodiversity, and workplace culture. More general workplace culture information was requested for the ‘creating autism friendly environments’ module, but also specific information about bullying and stigma. This has been included.

Expert Feedback

Experts were very supportive of the modules they reviewed, only suggesting minor changes or inclusions for the modules. This feedback has been incorporated into the modules. Some specific feedback was that Module 6 (Depression) “is beautifully written”, Module 9 (Suicide) “is very good”, and that Module 5 (Anxiety) “should be a very useful resource”.

Final Module Structure (following stakeholder consultation)

Below is the final module structure and intended learning outcomes (ILO). ILOs represent the intended skills students should be able to demonstrate after completing each module.

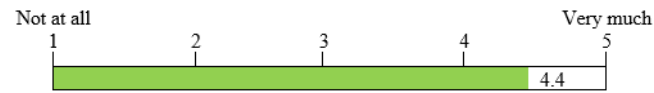
1. What is well-being?
 - Recognise the key elements of mental well-being
 - Explain the importance of positive well-being in the workplace
 - Understand how well-being can be supported at work
2. What does it mean to be on the autism spectrum?
 - Recognise the main types of traits and behaviours common to autism
 - Recognise common challenges people on the autism spectrum face in the workplace
 - Be able to implement strategies to better support yourself and/or others on the autism spectrum in the workplace
3. Creating autism friendly work environments
 - Recognise the need for a culture of inclusion within the workplace
 - Identify barriers and enablers (e.g., policies and procedures, physical work environment) that impact access and inclusion to open employment for people on the autism spectrum
 - Identify and explain types of workplace modifications that help create an autism friendly workplace.
4. Managing stress in the workplace
 - Identify physical, emotional and behavioural signs of stress in yourself and individuals you support or work with.
 - Recognise common signs of stress amongst individuals on the autism spectrum.
 - Implement strategies to help yourself and others during times of stress.
5. Identifying and supporting anxiety in the workplace
 - Identify physical, emotional, cognitive and behavioural signs of anxiety in yourself or others you work with.
 - Recognise signs of anxiety amongst individuals on the autism spectrum.
 - Understand and implement strategies to better support yourself and others with anxiety.
6. Identifying and supporting depression in the workplace
 - Identify physical, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural signs of depression in yourself or others you work with
 - Recognise signs of depression amongst individuals on the autism spectrum
 - Understand and implement strategies to better support yourself and others with depression
7. Sleep and well-being
 - Recognise signs of poor sleep
 - Identify physical, mental and emotional consequences of poor sleep
8. Non-suicidal self-injury
 - Identify signs of self-injury behaviours
 - Be able to recognise and implement strategies to support someone who is deliberately injuring themselves
9. Suicide and suicidal ideation
 - Identify signs of suicidal ideation in people on the autism spectrum
 - Implement strategies to guide individuals who report suicidal ideation toward appropriate supports
10. Seeking and providing support
 - Recall general steps to seek or provide support
 - Recognise different types of mental health professional
 - Identify the fundamentals of self-care and professional boundaries
11. Supporting well-being – Return to work
 - Recall strategies important for supporting mental health disclosure in the workplace
 - Identify best practices for supporting yourself, or someone who takes leave due mental ill health
 - Identify best practices for supporting the return to work for yourself, or someone else who has taken leave due to mental illness

Pilot Testing

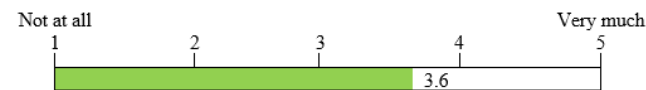
'Module 5 – Identify and supporting anxiety in the workplace' was piloted on Wednesday the 28th of December 2019 at ANZ Bank premises, Melbourne.

- Participants were 3 managers, 2 co-workers, and 7 employees on the autism spectrum
- Participants worked through a printed version of the module, stopping for discussion at key points
- 11 participants completed a survey assessing the module, with average responses to each survey question reported below
- Overall feedback was generally very positive. Participants identified some concerns with language and structure, as well as additional information which were included in subsequent drafts.

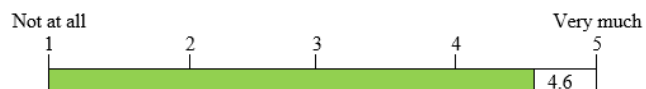
1. Was the tone of the language used in this module respectful?



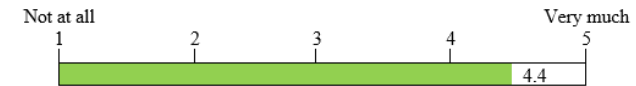
2. Was the language used easy to read and follow?



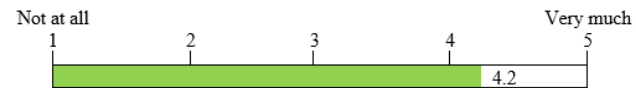
3. Was there sufficient information that you felt you had a good general understanding of anxiety?



4. Was there sufficient information that you felt you had a good understanding of anxiety in autism?



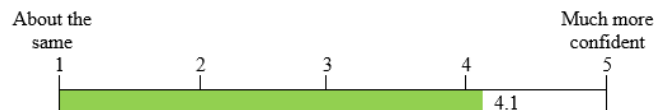
5. Were the recommendations/strategies helpful?



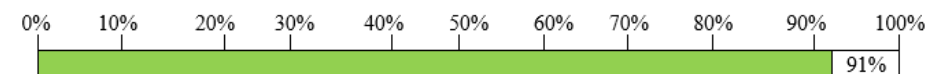
6. Were the resources helpful?



7. Do you feel more confident in supporting yourself or someone with anxiety?



8. Quiz – Participants also completed an 8-tem quiz



Summary

The result of the consultancy, pilot testing and work of the authors is a versatile and innovative 11 module training and resource package that serves a range of audiences with differing levels of engagement. Content spans autism awareness and reducing barriers to employment, specific mental health challenges and conditions, as well as information on supporting the support staff, and best practice for taking leave and returning to work.

The content includes mental health information as experienced in the general population (this includes individuals on the autism spectrum), as well as specific autism mental health information. In this way, the package provides mental health training that should benefit all staff. Due to the modular approach to the package, there remains the opportunity for additional content to be included in the future, to broaden the knowledge base of mental health challenges and concerns.

Application of the content

Some of the content is already being included in the Life Sherpa platform, thus providing an interactive application of the content of the training packages.

We have formatted the content in a document that can be shared as a complete training manual. We envision that this content could further be:

- Published as a book
- Included in further into applications (e.g., Life Sherpa)
- Converted into an interactive online training course
- Become part of in person training and organisation accreditation process

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the steering committee members and expert reviewers for donating their time to such an important project. We also thank OTARC staff who provided advice and comments across the development of the project.

Finally we thank DXC Technology and ANZ Bank for supporting such an important and impactful projects. This product fills a gap in supporting employees on the autism spectrum, and would not have been possible without your support.