

Taking action against anxiety and depression: a snapshot of views among blue collar, Australian males.

Background

In June 2015, *beyondblue* will launch the next stage of the Man Therapy campaign aimed at blue collar males across Australia. The campaign aims to shift entrenched community attitudes towards men's mental health, and to overcome the barriers associated with taking action against depression or anxiety. The original Man Therapy campaign launched in 2013 following research into men's help-seeking behaviour commissioned by *beyondblue*. The research showed that due to a number of barriers, including stigma, men were less likely than women to seek help for mental health issues.

beyondblue commissioned TNS Social Research to seek the perspectives of blue collar males on men's mental health. An online survey of n=305 blue collar males aged 25-54 across Australia was undertaken. Participants were asked a series of questions to gain insight into current attitudes, beliefs and behaviours with regard to their experience, perceptions and attitudes towards mental health, in particular, depression and anxiety.

The pages which follow summarise ten key findings from the research.

1. Nine in ten blue collar males recognise that talking about mental health is important. However, only half will actually have a conversation if they are experiencing poor mental health.

- Most blue collar men (86%) surveyed believe that *talking* about mental health is important.
- A slightly lower proportion (82%) of blue collar men believe that *seeking help* for mental health is important.

Agreement that ...	6-10 (total agree)	10 /10 (strongly agree)
Talking about mental health is important	86	38
Seeking help if you are experiencing depression or anxiety is important	82	40

There is a gap between the attitudes and behaviours associated with help-seeking - what men *know* they should be doing, and, what they actually do and believe others are doing.

- However, if experiencing psychological distress themselves, only half indicated that they would speak to their GP (49%) or a mate (44%). A similar proportion would have a conversation with a family member (52%) or a partner (57%).
- If a *mate was experiencing depression or anxiety* most men would recommend talking to a GP (85%) or 'family and friends' (79%) even though they aren't as likely to do this themselves, or, think that others would.

Likelihood to ...	6-10 (total likely that I would do)	10 /10 (highly likely that I would do)	6-10 (total likely that others would do)
Have a conversation with a Doctor or GP	49	12	40
Have a conversation with a family member	52	16	39
Have a conversation with a mate	44	14	46
Seek information about it	46	12	
Go online	36	8	
Call a helpline / Support Service	24	7	
Use an e-health mental health tool	20	3	
Join an online forum	13	3	

2. Help-seeking behaviours are inhibited among blue collar males due to self-stigma, reinforcing the existence of an entrenched perception that men should tackle problems independently.

- Half (50%) who indicated that they wouldn't take action claimed that this was due to various stigmatising attitudes towards themselves – including self-blame, shame and inadequacy.
- A further 18% of those who wouldn't reach out attributed the reason to either a lack of awareness or current perceptions of support mechanisms available.
- Nearly one in ten (7%) wouldn't reach out because they wouldn't be sure that they had a problem.

Frequency of spontaneous reasons for not seeking-help – self stigma (%)	
Self-blame "I'd like to think I could get through it by myself" "I'm strong-minded" "I'm supposed to be the provider and rock of the family"	33
Shame "Self-consciousness" "Embarrassment"	14
Inadequacy "I don't want to burden others"	3

- Furthermore, nearly one in five (17%) believe that men who *seek help* for depression or anxiety are weaker than other men.

3. One third of blue collar men think that men who have anxiety or depression would be seen as 'weak' or 'soft'.

- One third think that men who have anxiety or depression would be seen as 'weak' (30%) or 'soft' (28%).
 - Almost half (47%) agree that men who have depression or anxiety are unpredictable.
 - Only half (54%) agree that men with depression or anxiety are 'just like the rest of us'.
 - Only a third (36%) indicate that they would be seen as 'trustworthy'.
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4. Confidence to take action, compounded by knowledge on how to take action also act as significant barriers to 'reaching out' among blue collar men.

- One in four (26%) are not confident that they have the *ability to take action against depression or anxiety*.
- One third don't feel that they have the *knowledge to take action*.
- Only one in five 'strongly agree' that they would *know what to do if they were struggling with anxiety or depression*.

Agreement that ...	0-5 (don't agree)	6-10 (total agree)	10 /10 (strongly agree)
I feel confident I have the ability to take action against depression or anxiety	26	69	20
I have the knowledge to take action against depression or anxiety	32	64	19
I would know what to do if I was struggling with anxiety and depression	29	67	20

5. Self-reported knowledge of anxiety and depression showed that there is a need to raise awareness of the signs.

- Around two in five (38%) don't feel well informed about the signs and symptoms of anxiety and a similar proportion (32%) feel the same about depression.
- And, almost one in ten (7%) spontaneously admitted they wouldn't reach out due to being unsure about the signs and symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Agreement that ...	0-5 (don't agree)	6-10 (total agree)	10 /10 (strongly agree)
I am well informed about the signs and symptoms of anxiety	38	57	15
I am well informed about the signs and symptoms of depression	32	63	16

6. Harmful coping mechanisms are considered a way to manage the poor mental health among blue collar males, demonstrating the need for targeted support.

- Nearly a third would turn to alcohol (28%) if they did begin to experience the signs and symptoms of depression or anxiety. This supports the existence of gap between attitudes and behaviours among blue collar males, as only 16% would recommend alcohol to a friend.
- Fifteen per cent indicate that they would turn to illicit or prescription drugs.

Likelihood to ...	6-10 (total likely)
Turn to alcohol	28
Turn to illicit or prescription drugs	15

7. The frequency with which blue collar men employ protective mechanisms against anxiety and depression is not always high, and over half acknowledge that these mechanisms would help to overcome barriers to help-seeking.

Increased usage of protective mechanisms is particularly important as one in ten (10%) blue collar males surveyed are currently experiencing high levels of psychological distress¹. A third (33%) are experiencing moderate levels.

- Over half (51%) indicate that having more free time to do things that make them feel positive and improve their mental health would make seeking help easier.
- However, sixteen per cent indicate that they have spent quality time with the family less than twice in the last six months, and almost one in five say the same for socialising with their mates (19%).
- Around a third only exercise once a fortnight or less (31%).

8. Compounding this, exposure to risk factors associated with mental health conditions is not uncommon.

- Nearly a third (29%) work long hours more than once a week or everyday.
- And, one in five (23%) don't get a good night's sleep more than once a than once a week or everyday.

¹ Participant levels of psychological distress were measured through the survey using the Kessler-6 (K6) measure of psychological distress. It is important to note that the K6 does not indicate the presence of a mental health problem.

9. Half indicate that reducing stigma within the community would make it easier for them to seek help, elevating the need to challenge perceptions on mental health among blue collar males.

- Over half (54%) felt that 'less stigma in the community' would make it easier to seek help.
- In addition, around half thought having more understanding friends and family (55%) and workplace / colleagues (43%) would make seeking help easier.

10. There is a need to raise awareness among men that help is available through various channels, and online resources have an important role to play in the provision of this support.

- About a third (31%) of blue collar males don't feel that *they have people in their life that they can talk to about their mental health issues*.
- Forty-two percent indicated that more readily available information would make it easier to seek help.
- A large proportion (70%) of men would recommend to someone who was experiencing depression or anxiety to 'look up some information online about the way they're feeling'.

Agreement that ...	0-5 (don't agree)	6-10 (total agree)	10 /10 (strongly agree)
I have people in my life I can talk to about my mental health issues	30	69	29



ABOUT *beyondblue*

Most people in Australia have some experience with depression and anxiety, whether it is personal or via family, friends or work colleagues. *beyondblue's* work is aimed at achieving an Australian community that understands depression and anxiety, empowering every person in Australia, at any life-stage, to seek help. *beyondblue* raises awareness, reduces stigma and ensures that people have access to the information they need to support recovery, management and resilience.

beyondblue works in partnership with health services, schools, workplaces, universities, media and community organisations, as well as people living with depression and anxiety, their friends and family, to bring together expertise and provide tools and resources.

Further information regarding *beyondblue*, please visit: www.beyondblue.org.au



ABOUT TNS

TNS Social Research has more than 500 dedicated social researchers working across 40+ countries. We are recognised as the research partner inspiring the world's leading policy makers by providing action-oriented analysis and recommendations based on evidence. Each year we conduct millions of interviews through a range of quantitative and qualitative methodologies to help our clients understanding and track public opinion on a local and international level. We assist decision makers across public sector and government bodies; the media, non-government organisation and major international and national institutions; with specialist expertise in disadvantage, education, health, social services, environment, workforce, family, public transport, justice, immigration and community integration.

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