

Ahead for Business summary

January - June 2024

Ahead for Business is the only national prevention-focused program supporting small business owners in taking a proactive approach to their mental health and wellbeing. The online tools and resources are research-based and tailored to the unique needs of small business owners. *Ahead for Business* is promoted across the country by government, business and not-for-profit stakeholders.

Digital portal engagement



Check-up results

The *Ahead for Business* check-ups help small business owners take action and quickly assess their progress to improve their mental health and wellbeing.

Small Business Wellbeing Plan

The Wellbeing Plan supports small business owners in preparing for the challenges they might face so that they are better able to manage tough times or unexpected situations.

Over this six-month period, the most frequently selected focus area was **personal wellbeing**. Small business owners were able to identify a variety of actions to help improve their personal wellbeing, including:

- Exercising (swimming and walking were common)
- Connection (making new friends, talking to friends and family time)
- Hobbies (meditation, reading, music).



Rural Agribusiness Wellbeing Plan

During this period, agribusinesses experienced similar stressors and priorities to the previous six months. The primary concerns were **general wellbeing** (30%) and **financial stress** (25%). It is interesting to note that only 5% of users selected 'red tape' as a concern in these six months, as opposed to 16% in the previous period.

Business Stress Test

There were **104 completions** of the Business Stress Test during this period.

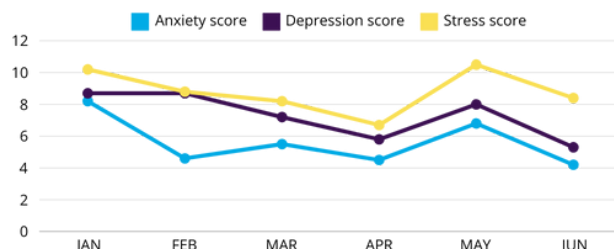
Small business owners tended to be impacted 'severely' or 'more than ever' by:

- Not having enough time to do everything (50%)
- Not having someone with the same level of responsibility to share the stress (47%)
- Feeling alone or isolated from others in day-to-day work (43%)
- Being responsible for all aspects of the business (43%).

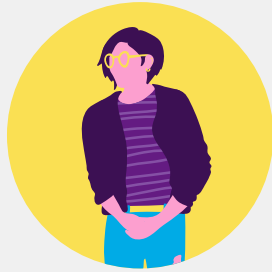
Whereas experiences of succession planning (14%), relationship issues (e.g. conflict) at home impacting time at work (19%), and red tape (20%) did not affect small business owners 'much' or in a 'normal amount' during this period.

Mental Health Check-up

There were **96 completions** of the mental health check-up during this period. Scores on the depression, anxiety and stress scale show January and May to high be periods of poorer mental health and wellbeing, perhaps due to new year stressors and end of financial year.



Mental Health Check-up small business owner scores



- **Depression:** 59% scored outside the normal range for depression, 25% were severe/extremely severe. Business owners who scored high on depression were also more likely to score low on wellbeing.
- **Anxiety:** 55% scored outside the normal range for anxiety, 24% were severe/extremely severe. Business owners who scored high on anxiety were also likely to score highly on stress (correlation = 0.75). Business owners who scored highly on depression were more likely to experience anxiety.
- **Stress:** 53% scored outside the normal range for stress, 20% were severe/extremely severe.
- **Alcohol:** 64% of users has a score outside of the 'low risk' alcohol consumption (based on female scoring).

Anxiety and stress do not strongly affect wellbeing scores, indicating that business owners can be stressed, but still feel a sense of wellbeing.

Business Wellbeing Online Training

The Business Wellbeing Online Training builds small business owners' skills and confidence in managing mental health in the workplace. During this period, **156 new users** registered for the Business Wellbeing Online Training.

- 31% of those who started the training finished all four modules.
- Users showed progression in training, particularly after reaching module 2. Almost all users (99%) who completed module 2 went on to finish the training in its entirety.



News and e-newsletters

During this period, three *Ahead for Business* news items and two e-newsletters were published.

There was an increase of 27 new e-newsletter subscribers compared to the previous six-month period.

The most popular news items were:

- COSBOA and Square report on the state of small business in Australia
- Business.gov.au business trends for 2024
- Business Wellbeing Online Training.

There were also improvements in engagement with the e-newsletter during this period, with open and click-through rates surpassing industry averages.

Advocacy

The *Ahead for Business* team has been advocating for preventative programs that support the mental health and wellbeing of small business owners. This included:



- Attendance at the Council of Small Business Owners Australia Summit 2024 to promote *Ahead for Business* and highlight mental health at this event.
- Meetings with various sector and government stakeholders to talk about prevention and new small business owner engagement strategies to expand the reach and awareness of programs such as *Ahead for Business*.

Next steps

As of 1 July 2024, the *Ahead for Business* program will no longer be funded by the Australian Treasury and will transition to being self-funded by Everymind. We are actively seeking additional funding opportunities to expand the program nationwide.