

tune in now



MODULE 4: TAKING ACTION

HOW TO BUILD AN EFFECTIVE ACTION PLAN AND WHERE TO SEEK SUPPORT.

TOPIC 1: Action planning

It's important you encourage men to 'take action' through a holistic approach to their social and emotional wellbeing. This can include:

- Personal activities
- Group and recreational pursuits
- Collaboration with health professionals.

Most importantly, develop an action plan in consultation with the person you're supporting.

Useful resource

- *beyondblue*: Taking action - anxiety and depression
beyondblue.org.au/resources/for-me/men/taking-action

Personal activities

- Exercise and activity
- Getting some early morning sun
- Massage
- Yoga and deep breathing
- Avoiding alcohol and drugs
- Positive thinking
- Distraction – doing things that make him feel good
- If computer skills and accessibility permit, suggest *beyondblue*'s online resources like men's shed.

Useful resource

- Be Mindful Online: Online mindfulness course
bemindful.co.uk

“People need to feel connected in some way. Homeless men can be very isolated.”

– Aamir, a man with lived experience of homelessness

Group and recreational pursuits

Men who are homeless or at risk of homelessness may feel isolated and alone. These feelings can be magnified by the experience of anxiety and depression. If they don't have family, friends and support networks, it may fall on you to listen, offer support and facilitate recreational activities.

Collaboration with health professionals

When appropriate, you could offer to organise an appointment with the following health professionals:

- General practitioner
- Mental health worker
- Counsellor
- Psychologist (referred by a GP or mental health worker)
- Psychiatrist (referred by a GP).

Or, you could try:

- E-therapies: Online programs for people experiencing depression and anxiety. For people with mild to moderate depression, psychological therapies like cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) could be useful.
- Telephone counselling: Talk to a mental health professional at *beyondblue* by calling 1300 22 4636
- Online counselling: Chat online with a mental health professional

Not all men will want to see a psychologist or psychiatrist. They may have had a bad experience in the past and will dismiss it for next time. If you can find out their fears, you might be able to build a more responsive and supportive action plan.

It's a good idea to research local mental health clinics, and have information on hand when you work out the action plan. And always follow your organisation's policies on referral and assessment procedures.

Health professionals who can help

General Practitioners (GPs)

GPs are the best starting point for men seeking professional help. A good GP can:

- Make a diagnosis
- Check for physical health problems or medication that may be contributing to the depression or anxiety
- Discuss available treatments
- Work with the person to draw up a Mental Health Treatment Plan so he can get a Medicare rebate for psychological treatment
- Provide brief counselling or, in some cases, talking therapy
- Prescribe medication
- Refer a person to a mental health specialist such as a psychologist or psychiatrist.

Helpful tips:

- Book a longer or double appointment so there's plenty of time to talk without feeling rushed
- Suggest he raise the issue of depression or anxiety early in the consultation, so the GP best suited to dealing with mental health problems can step in
- Consult the same GP, or another GP in the same clinic, as medical information is shared within a practice
- Contact *beyondblue* on 1300 224 636 or search their Find A Professional directory (beyondblue.org.au/get-support/find-a-professional) if the person doesn't have a regular GP with expertise in treating mental health problems.

Psychologist

Experts in human behaviour, psychologists can help people overcome challenges and live meaningful lives through evidence-based strategies. Clinical psychologists specialise in the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of mental health problems. Psychologists and clinical psychologists aren't doctors and can't prescribe medication.

Psychiatrist

Psychiatrists are doctors who specialise in mental health. They can make medical and psychiatric assessments, conduct medical tests, provide therapy and prescribe medication. If the depression is severe and hospital admission is needed, a psychiatrist will be in charge of the person's treatment.

A GP will refer someone to see a psychiatrist if the depression or anxiety is severe, lasts for a long time, is associated with a high risk of self-harm or has failed to respond to treatment.

Mental Health Nurse Practitioners

Specially trained to care for people with mental health problems, these practitioners work with psychiatrists and GPs to review the state of a person's mental health and monitor their medication. They also provide people with information about mental health problems and treatment.

Social workers in mental health

Social workers can support people with depression and anxiety by helping them find ways of managing situations that trigger these disorders. These can include family issues, financial problems, work stress and living arrangements. They can also provide psychological self-help strategies, like relaxation training, problem solving and stress management.

Occupational therapists in mental health

Occupational therapists help people who have difficulty functioning because of a mental health problem to take part in normal, everyday activities. They can also provide focused psychological self-help strategies.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health workers

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health workers understand the issues facing Indigenous people and what's needed to provide culturally safe and accessible services. They can help with:

- Case management
- Screening
- Assessment
- Referrals
- Transport to and attendance at specialist appointments
- Education
- Improving access to mainstream services
- Advocacy
- Counselling
- Support for family and acute distress response.

Counsellors

Counsellors work in many places, from youth services and private practices to community health centres, schools and universities. A counsellor can talk through problems and look for possible solutions, like providing referral options to trained mental health professionals in the local community.

Find out the counsellor's qualifications and whether they're registered with a state board or a professional society. A good counsellor will be happy to provide this information.

Complementary health practitioners

Despite there being many alternative and complementary treatments for depression and anxiety, many aren't covered by Medicare.

If a person wants complementary treatment, you can:

- Check whether the practitioner is registered by a state registration board or a professional society
- Make sure the practitioner uses treatments supported by evidence
- Read the *beyondblue* booklets 'A guide to what works for depression' and 'A guide to what works for anxiety' to find effective, evidence-based treatments
- Pre-screen GPs to find someone more empathetic towards people experiencing homelessness.

Useful resources

- ➔ *beyondblue*: Find A Professional Directory: A directory of medical and allied health professionals in mental health
beyondblue.org.au/get-support/find-a-professional
- ➔ Mind Your Head: National network of qualified counselors who are trained mental health professionals
mindyourhead.com.au

TOPIC 2: Providing support in the 'taking action' phase

If someone doesn't want support

You need to respect this. But this doesn't mean give up. Try again another time, or ask a different caseworker to start a conversation.

If someone does want support

Follow up. Check in to see how he's going, or how his appointment went. If you agreed to do something, like researching GPs, make sure you do it. This builds trust and a solid rapport.

Useful resource

- *beyondblue*: Recovery and staying well – Practical tips for dealing with anxiety and depression
beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/recovery-and-staying-well

TOPIC 3: Looking after yourself

Maintaining your own wellbeing is important for you, the men you're supporting, and your colleagues. It can be stressful dealing with depression and anxiety, so here are some tips for looking after yourself:

- De-brief with a colleague or supervisor after an incident or conversation
- Look after yourself physically through a healthy diet, regular exercise and adequate sleep
- Foster and maintain personal relationships with friends and family
- Develop interests and friendships outside your work environment
- Make time for positive activities to help you relax and have fun
- Strive for balance between your professional role and your personal life; try to leave work issues at work
- Limit the use of alcohol and other substances; don't rely on these for relaxation
- Learn how to manage your stress in positive ways, like through exercise, relaxation and breathing
- Find a mentor through your workplace or professional networks and use that person's support to help you grow professionally and personally
- Take part in professional supervision; it's a chance to reflect and identify any learning opportunities
- Provide support and encouragement for colleagues, give constructive feedback and be a role model
- If you have spiritual beliefs, make time for regular spiritual practice, or relationships with others who share your philosophy
- Reach out for support when you need it from colleagues, friends, family, your GP, a psychologist, or an employee assistance program through your workplace.

Useful resources

- *beyondblue*: Reducing Stress Fact Sheet 6
tuneinnow.com.au/resources/Reducing%20Stress.pdf
- Be Mindful Online: Online mindfulness course
bemindfulonline.com