



# Improving mental health in the mining industry

*Professor Brian Kelly  
University of Newcastle*

*Jaelea Skehan  
Hunter Institute of Mental Health*

**WORKING WELL**



# Session overview

## Setting the scene:

- ❖ What we know about mining and mental health

## ACARP project:

- ❖ What we are doing - 'Working Well'

## Mentally healthy workplaces:

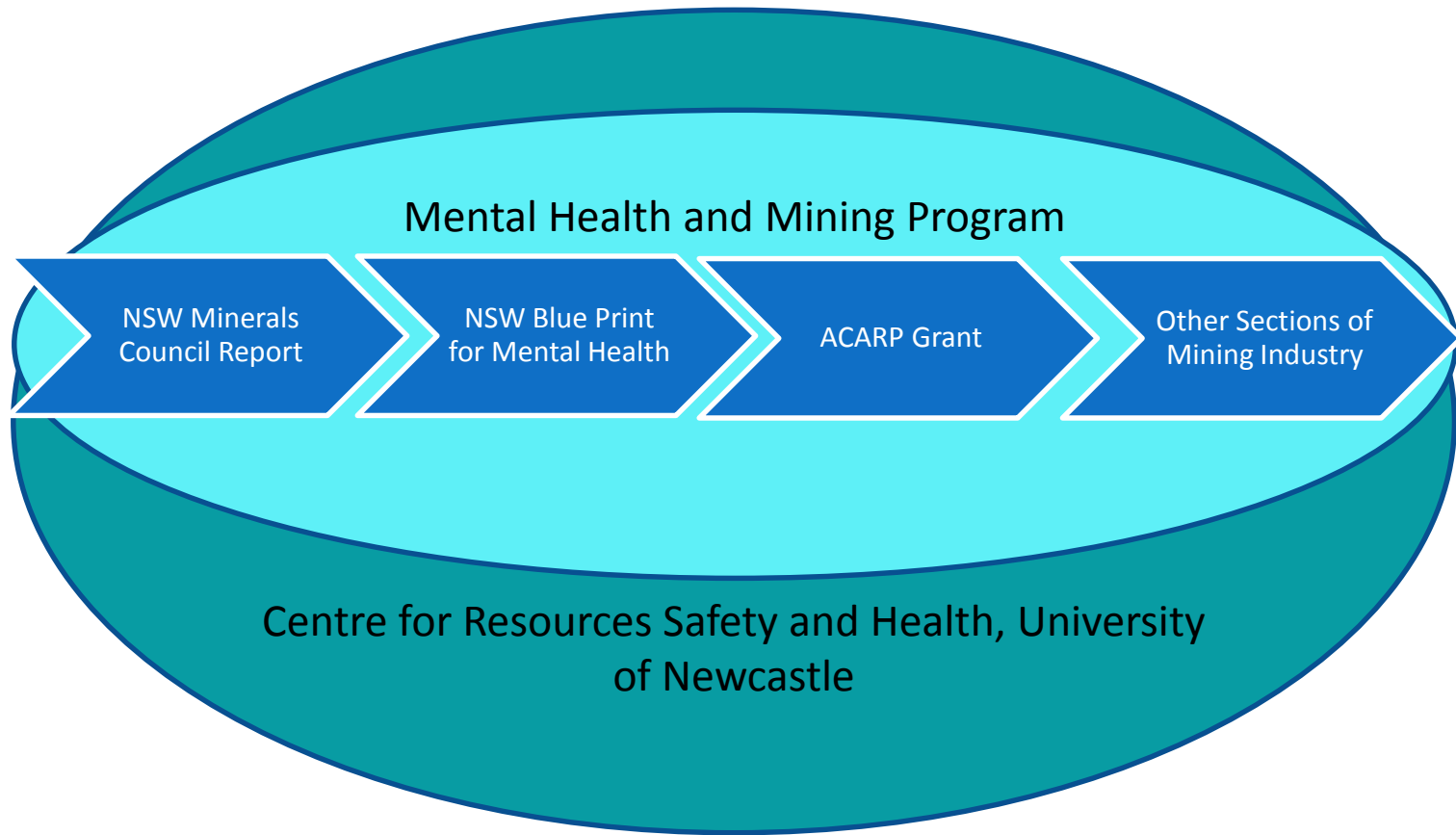
- ❖ What is mental health and how do we 'get it'?
- ❖ How can we build mentally healthy mine sites?



# What do we know about mental health and mining?

*Professor Brian Kelly, University of Newcastle*

# Mining & mental health: The journey so far



# Mental illness – national data

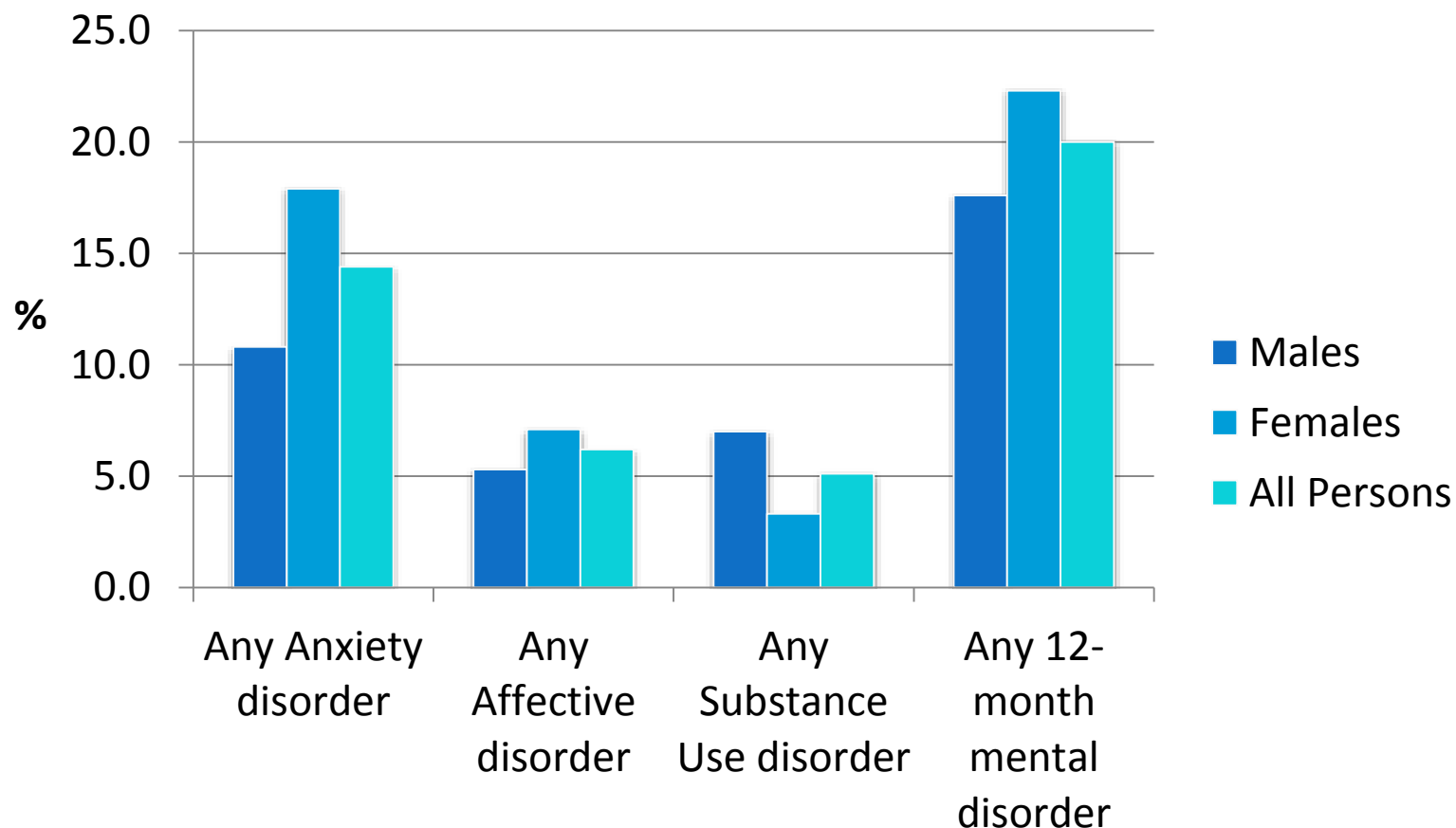


**1 in 5 people**

**will experience a mental illness in any 12 month period**



# Mental illness – national data



# Impact on Australian workplaces



## Productivity

- Estimated cost \$AU20 billion per year

## Absenteeism

- 35-45% attributable to Mental Illness

## Presenteeism

- Estimates of 18 days lost per year for people with a mental illness

## Injury

- Risk of injury greater for people with a mental illness



# So what about mining?

## The ACARP project: Working Well

**WORKING WELL**

**MENTAL HEALTH & MINING**

AN ACARP FUNDED RESEARCH PROGRAM





# What is Working Well?

- ACARP funded research project
- Developing knowledge for industry on:
  - scope of the mental health problem and its impact
  - workplace mental health interventions in Coal Industry
- Partnership between:
  - ACARP;
  - University of Newcastle (including NIER);
  - Hunter Institute of Mental Health;
  - with support from Mates in Construction and mining sector.



# Who is involved?

- Industry Monitors oversee research
- Industry engagement and advice
  - working with research team in development, implementation and evaluation
- Monitors provide 6 monthly report to ACARP
- Monitors include
  - Shane Hansford (QRC)
  - Andrew McMahon (NSWMC)
  - Shane Apps (Peabody)
  - Liam Wilson (RTCA)



# Purpose of the study

- The purpose of the study is to better understand mental health problems in the coal mining industry in NSW and Queensland and how these problems may affect a person, including the impact on their work.



# Phase 1 – scoping study

- 8 coal mines in NSW and Queensland
- Focus groups and interviews w managers (Mine, HR, OHS and Supervisors)
- Employees computer survey (~1200 employees)
  - Current health and symptoms including injury
  - Understanding of mental health problems and attitudes to mental illness
  - Factors associated with mental health problems (e.g. family, personal, work activity)



## Phase 2 - intervention

- Testing strategies
  - 4 mines
    - 2 Queensland
    - 2 in NSW
- Feasibility of addressing mental health problems in coal mines through:
  - Policy review
  - Supervisor and leader training
  - Workforce education and training (including peer-support).



# Progress to date

- Data collection completed in 5 mines with 3 remaining;
- Intervention completed and one site in NSW with plans for additional sites.
- Some similarities and some difference across mine sites coming out (although too early to interpret data).



# Next steps

- Results of ACARP research project
- Expansion to other sections of mining industry:
  - Metalliferous sector
  - Other states
- Partnership with MCA



# What is mental health and how can we develop mentally healthy individuals and workplaces?

*Jaelea Skehan, Hunter Institute of Mental Health*

**WORKING WELL**



# Activity: what is mental health?



**What does mental health  
mean to you?**

# Activity: what is mental health?



## What does mental health mean to you?

- State of wellbeing, where we can realise our potential, cope with normal stressors, live and work fruitfully, and make a contribution to society.
- More than the absence of illness.

# An analogy:



**How did I  
become an  
expert in  
keeping my  
car running  
well?**

**My first car – a  
Datsun 120Y**



# Things a car needs to run well...





# Mental ill-health

**Mental ill-health** is an umbrella term which encompasses:

- ▶ **Mental illness or mental disorder** is a diagnosable illness that significantly interferes with an individual's cognitive, emotional or social abilities. There are different types of mental illnesses and each of these will occur with a different degree of severity.
- ▶ **A mental health problem** also interferes with a person's cognitive, emotional or social abilities, but may not meet the criteria of an illness. Mental health problems often occur as a result of life stressors, and are usually less severe and of shorter duration than mental disorders, although they may develop into mental disorders.



**When I was  
worried  
something  
wasn't quite  
right with  
the car...**





**What would I  
do if I was  
worried about  
a family  
member,  
colleague or  
friend's car?**



# Thinking about mental health



**What influences our  
mental health at work?**

**WORKING WELL**





# Influences on mental health?

- **Structural:** e.g. safe working conditions, employment security, inclusive workplace etc.
- **Community:** e.g. sense of belonging, access to social support, freedom from bullying etc
- **Individual:** ability to deal with thoughts, manage life and cope, good physical wellbeing

# Workplace responses



**What can workplaces do?**

**WORKING WELL**

# The Blueprint



## Blueprint Overview

Education

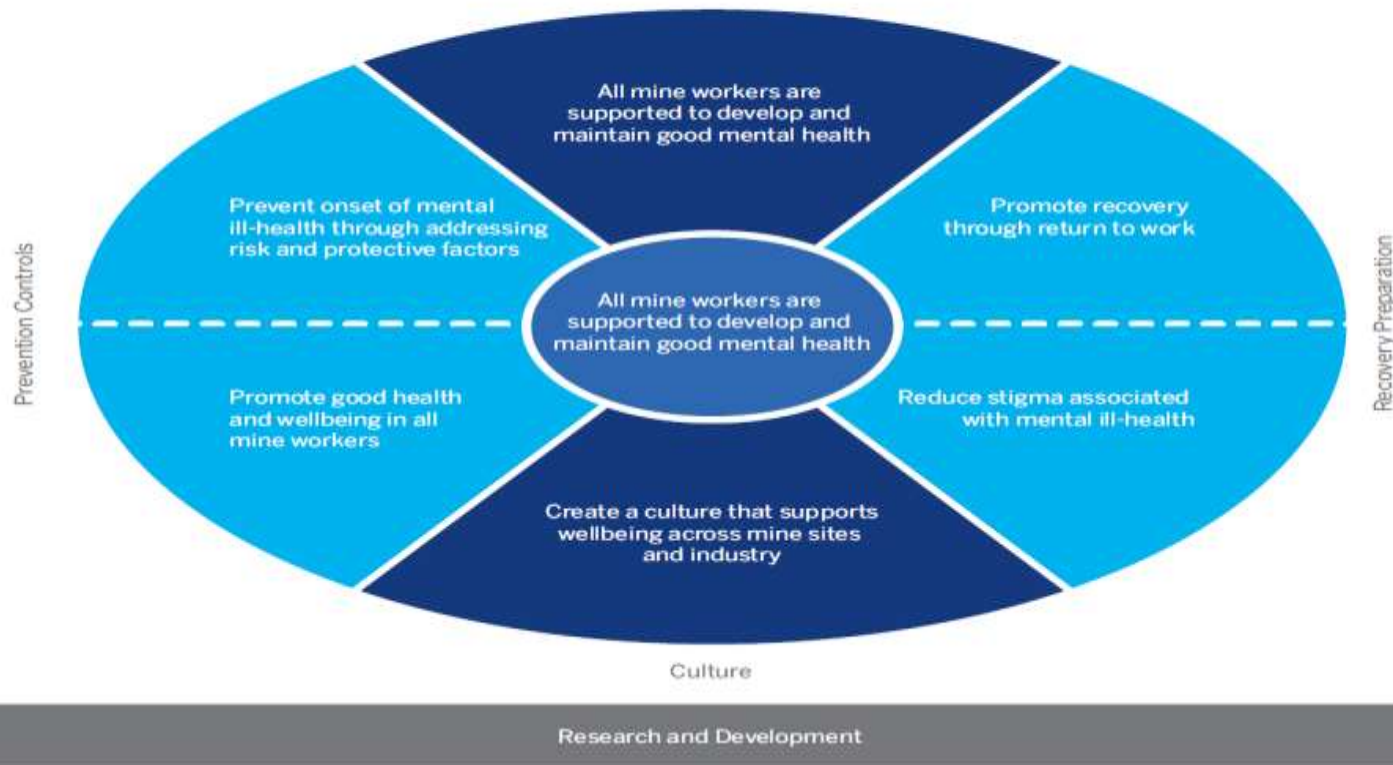
Training

Policy

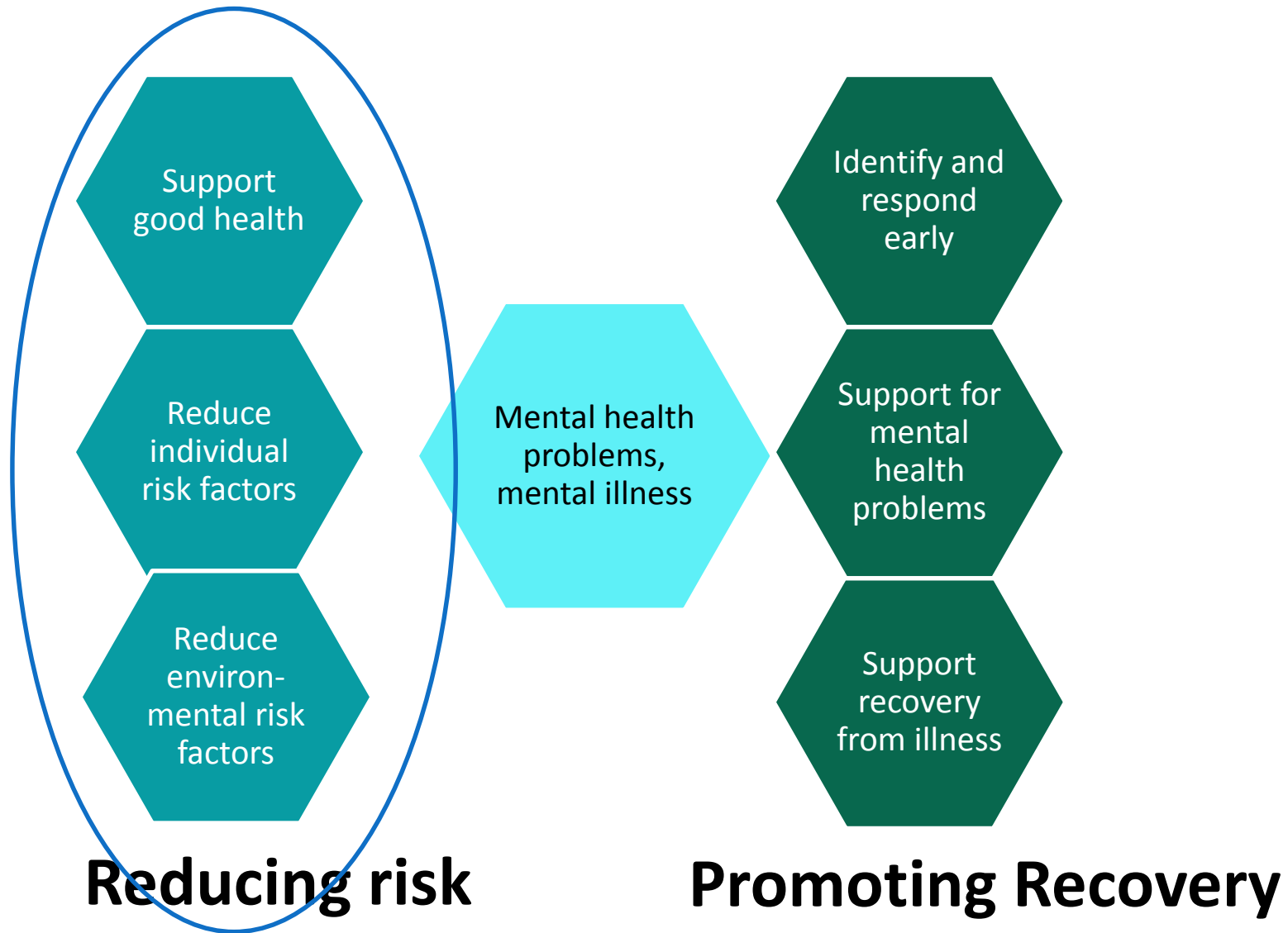
Health Assessments

System Review

Partnership




# Managing mental health at work





Support  
good health

- Ensuring a good fit between the job and the person doing the job;
- Preparing people well for the work they need to do;
- Creating a culture of high expectations along with support
- Having a culture of fairness and equity;
- Promoting mental health literacy (how to stay mentally healthy);
- Good communication between managers and staff;
- Increasing social connection and opportunities for peer-support.



Reduce  
individual  
risk factors

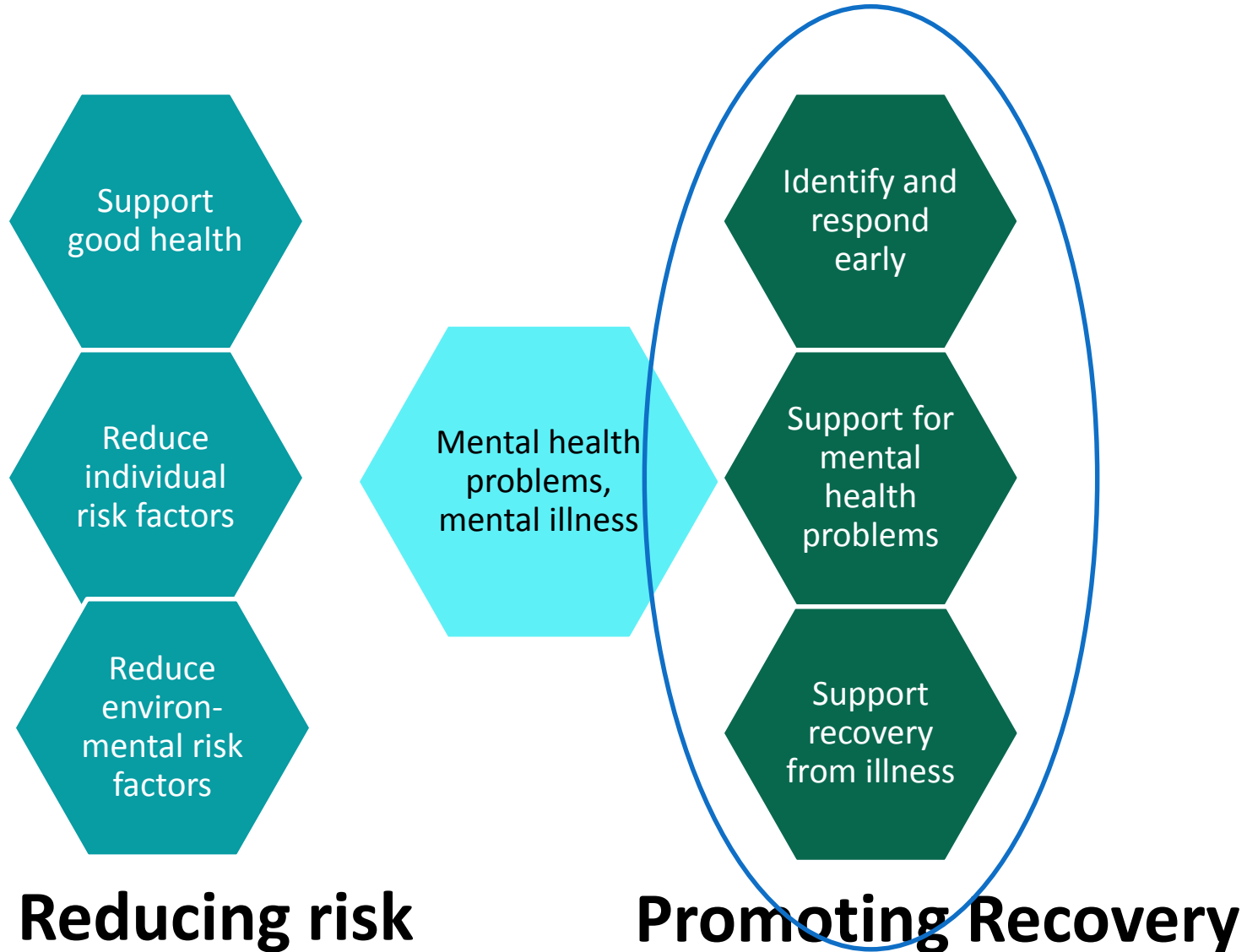
- Reducing drug and alcohol misuse;
- Support healthy diet and physical fitness;
- Develop individual skills – financial management, stress management, communication skills;
- Management of physical injury and/or pain;
- Options to support workers managing ill-health in family;
- Provide support and flexibility for staff exposed to traumatic events at work or experiencing difficult life events.




Reduce  
environ-  
mental risk  
factors

- Reduce or manage occupational risks
  - Tiredness
  - Boredom
  - Accidents
  - Excessive stress
  - Bullying and harassment
  - Disharmony

# Managing mental health at work







Identify and  
respond  
early

- Promote awareness of mental illness, signs, symptoms etc;
- Support early identification (self or others):
  - Self-identification, peer-identification and support;  
Identification by supervisors or managers;
- Promote culture of acceptance of mental health problems;
- Promote culture that help-seeking is a positive thing;
- Promote a culture of offering support, expressing concern for work colleagues;
- Supervisor training to increase skills in raising difficult, personal issues with staff in a helpful, non-threatening way.



Support for  
mental  
health  
problems

- Promote use of EAP for early support;
- Provide immediate first aid for staff experiencing a mental health crisis at work;
- Reassurance of support for staff receiving treatment for mental illness;
- Partnerships and referral pathways to mental health providers;
- Provide or facilitate access to peer-support models and/or online treatment modalities.



Support  
recovery  
from illness

- Take a positive optimistic approach;
- Manage absences well;
- Identify and address any workplace contributing factors;
- Manage return to work well;
- Make reasonable adjustments to the work environment;
- Supervisor training to manage return to work;
- Facilitate access to support options for family and friends;
- Address stigma in the workplace;

# What about supervisors and leaders?



- Whether you know it or not, at some stage you'll be either supervising or working alongside someone experiencing mental health problems.
- You may experience a mental health problem yourself.
- Everyone onsite can make a big difference.

# Scenario 1: Steve



Steve is a crew member in CHPP. You've noticed that he seems to be limping and sometimes he grimaces as though in pain when he does certain tasks.

## ACTIVITY:

- What do you do?
- Steve tells you that he turned his knee while surfing.
- What would you do now?

# Scenario 2: Mick



- Mick works in the production team. You notice he is less talkative than usual, is highly irritable and has called in sick a number of times (which is unlike him).

## ACTIVITY:

- Why is this behaviour a concern?
- What's different or similar to the issues you raised with Steve?

# Summary



- Mental health problems and mental illness are common.
- People will let you know that they aren't travelling well– look for the signs.
- You can do something to help someone who is struggling in the workplace.
- Look after yourself.



## Contacts:

[Brian.Kelly@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:Brian.Kelly@newcastle.edu.au)

[Jaelea.Skehan@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Jaelea.Skehan@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au)

