
Media release

21 November 2012

Today is national Go Home On Time Day!

Today is national Go Home On Time Day – the day Australians are urged to say ‘no’ to last-minute meetings, avoid out-of-hours emails and calls, and claim back some work/life balance.

Now in its fourth year, Go Home On Time Day is an initiative of The Australia Institute, a public policy think tank based in Canberra. The day was conceived as a light-hearted way to start a serious conversation about the impact of poor work/life balance on our health, relationships and workplaces.

A new research paper, *An unhealthy obsession? The impact of work hours and workplace culture on Australia’s health*, will be launched today at the National Press Club in Canberra. ACTU President Ged Kearney and *beyondblue* CEO Kate Carnell will discuss the issue of ‘*Improving productivity through healthier workplaces*’.

The research reveals that there is an epidemic of workplace-related stress and anxiety in Australia affecting around three million employees, and that one in two Australians would feel uncomfortable discussing issues about mental health with their manager.

The Australia Institute’s Executive Director Dr Richard Denniss said that a significant number of employees (43 per cent of those surveyed) reported that their managers are poorly skilled in discussing sensitive workplace issues.

“The survey shows that Australian workers find talking about mental health issues with their manager far harder than any other workplace issue. In fact, twice as many people find talking about mental health in the workplace more difficult than talking about work/life balance and job security,” said Dr Denniss.

“Those working for small businesses were nearly twice as likely as their colleagues in bigger organisations, to report that their overall workplace culture is ‘very good’. They were also twice as likely to report that their manager’s skills in holding conversations about mental health problems were ‘very good’ than those working for larger employers.”

beyondblue: the national depression and anxiety initiative is supporting Go Home On Time Day to raise awareness of the link between overwork and stress with anxiety and depression and to encourage organisations to take prevention seriously.

CEO of *beyondblue* Ms Kate Carnell AO said every Australian workplace should view the workplace e-learning programs on the *beyondblue* website or book a face-to-face training session in order to improve how they deal with depression and anxiety amongst employees.

For media enquiries please contact

The Australia Institute: Serena Rogers 0421 759 262

***beyondblue*: Reid Sexton 0413 777 393**

“This research shows that more than half of Australian workers say their employers are not good at dealing with mental health issues and that it’s a difficult subject for them to raise in the workplace.

“Our online interactive programs address the myths and misconceptions around depression and anxiety and would be helpful for employers, managers and staff,” said Ms Carnell.

Although 80 per cent of those surveyed said they would be comfortable discussing work/life balance with their manager, 50 per cent simultaneously said that they would like to work different hours. This suggests that it may be harder to talk about work/life issues than people admit or that managers are happier to listen to concerns than act on them.

“Australians work some of the longest hours in the developed world and the hours are becoming less and less predictable. But not only are millions of Australians unhappy with their work hours, they find it hard to talk about their concerns. Go Home On Time Day gives employees and managers an opportunity to start those conversations,” said Dr Denniss.

Other key findings include:

- Employees of small businesses are far more likely to report feeling comfortable raising workplace issues with their manager than employees of medium sized and large businesses. Further, in all instances the employees of medium sized businesses report being the least likely to feel comfortable raising such issues.
- More than a quarter (27 per cent) of respondents indicated that they considered that the ability to ‘work flexibly’ was a requirement of their workplace.
- Only 14 per cent of employees report that their workplace discourages unpaid overtime.
- More than 2.2 million Australians head out to work each morning with very little idea what time they will knock off that night.
- 3.2 million Australians experience stress or anxiety as a result of their working arrangements, with 2.9 million experiencing a loss of sleep and 2.2 million reporting adverse impacts on their ability to meet family commitments.

Notes for editors

- In September 2012, The Australia Institute conducted an online survey of 1,495 people in order to better understand their experience in the workplace, their preferences, and the consequences of any mismatch between the working hours they want and the working hours they have. Of the 1,495 survey respondents, 849 people reported being in paid work and the results presented are drawn from the responses of those respondents in paid work.
- Go Home On Time Day is an initiative of The Australia Institute, a Canberra-based think tank, www.tai.org.au

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