While it is critical to understand the legal requirements in place when working with employees, it is also important to consider what you can do to have an impact on the broader issues facing staff. Following is a list of key issues to consider relating to your business continuity, and ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of employees and their families.

Information from the Dept of Health and Human Services

- The situation is unprecedented and changing on an almost hourly basis. Ensure you are up to date with the most accurate information to make an informed decision for your workplace.

- Review your Business Continuity Plan and internal policies to ensure they're equipped and appropriate for the changing circumstances.

Australian Government Dept of Health

Employee and workplace hygiene

Are all staff aware of handwashing techniques, coughing etiquette and distancing from others, and is the workplace safe?

Consider:

- Putting notices up in your offices reminding employees of good workplace hygiene
- Providing regular updates about good hygiene
- Providing hand sanitiser at entry points and around the office
- Ensuring meeting rooms have tissues and rubbish bins
- Checking your building is being cleaned properly and frequently
- Providing employees with cleaning materials to clean their desks more frequently should they wish
- Having a deep cleaning plan in place should an employee or visitor later find that they are infected with COVID-19 and has been in the office
- Ensuring that contractors receive communications on workplace hygiene.

World Health Organisation

Health Direct

Safe Work Australia

General leave provisions

The legal leave requirements are outlined on the Fair Work webpage.

Consider:

- Hourly or casual employees
- Whether you want to change your working from home policy to include working when children are at home
- What, if any, provisions you want to put in place if employees run out of personal or sick leave
- Stress and anxiety during times of crisis can impact employees' mental health. Review whether your current policies and processes cater for this.

Fair Work

Flexible work practices

Review your flexible working arrangements policy.

Consider:

- Which roles / staff can work from home and which roles cannot?
- Whether your IT systems have the capacity for all staff to be working from home
- Whether staff have internet access or required equipment at home
- Whether you need to purchase additional IT equipment
- Stress testing the organisation's capacity to work from home
- How you might communicate with all staff should there be a need to work from home at very short notice
- Whether or when you might wish to move to a partial or full working from home situation
- Splitting your organisation into two groups and staggering their working from home to avoid cross-infection
- Updating your working from home policy or procedure to ensure that it meets your needs if employees are subject to quarantine

Flexible Work information sites

Workforce planning

Plan for a range of scenarios.

Consider:

- Which roles are essential
- Which essential roles can only be done by one or two specialists
- What your back-up plans are if all the employees undertaking these roles fall ill
- If certain tasks cannot be done from home, whether staff can be redeployed into other necessary roles.

Supporting staff during this period

Ensure that you support your staff during this difficult period.

Consider:

- Having the CEO or another senior staff member provide regular updates to staff about the situation
- Discussing the situation with your Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Informing staff how they can access their EAP
- Providing staff with links to other support services (see suggested links at the end of this guide)
- Ensuring managers check in regularly with their staff to see how they are faring
- Recommending employees who have low immunity or underlying health conditions, or direct family members with the same, work from home
- Recommending employees who have high levels of anxiety work from home

Psychologists offer advice for maintaining positive mental health

Beyond Blue - Looking after your mental health during the coronavirus outbreak

How to help an employee or colleague panicked by coronavirus

Travel policy

Review the organisation's travel policy to ensure it aligns with government requirements and recommendations:

Consider:

- Review the Smart Traveller website to check which countries have been deemed at risk
- Whether overseas travel for business should be cancelled
- Whether other travel for business should be cancelled or restricted to essential travel only
- If travel is continuing whether staff members can travel on the same aircraft
- What steps employees returning from overseas should take before returning to work
- What your duty of care to contractors is and whether you should align their travel to the organisation's travel policy.

Smart Traveller website – news

Smart Traveller website – COVID-19 and travel

Department of Home Affairs

Meetings, Events, Conferences

Develop a strategy for meetings and events, including ensuring that government policy is adhered to:

Consider:

- Options for using technology solutions to remove the need for a face to face or group meeting
- Whether employees are permitted to attend external events and meetings, and in what circumstances
- Which of these events or meetings can be held remotely
- Whether you are going to cancel or postpone some or all of the events or meetings that you are holding

Privacy and Discrimination

- Employees should be reminded about the organisation's anti-discrimination policy
- Remember to maintain employee's privacy should there be any diagnosed incidences.

Fair Work - Workplace Privacy

Communication plan

- Develop ways to keep all staff informed of organisational decisions impacting work and any other changes that have been decided.
- Communicate to stakeholders and customers regularly.

8 Ways to Communicate with employees during a crisis

NOTE: The information in this guide is intended to be general advice only. Please contact Tracey Stewart at Management 101 for further assistance specific to the context of your organisation.

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