



MEDIA RELEASE

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icare FOUNDATION INVESTS IN NEW E-MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY TO BETTER SUPPORT THE MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING OF SMALL BUSINESS OPERATORS

Whitepaper reveals the hidden cost of running a small business.

Reveals immediate need for web-based mental health solutions.

Trial due to start April 2018.

A new study funded by the [icare](#) Foundation has uncovered that people working in the small business sector may be more likely to be affected by poor mental health than the general population, prompting a compelling need for innovative solutions to assist those people who are the lifeblood of the NSW economy.

They are the findings from a landmark study conducted by [Everymind](#) through commissioned research by [icare's](#) Health & Community Engagement practice, which co-designs workforce wellbeing solutions for, and with, injured workers and employers; and the icare Foundation, an [icare](#) social venture supporting injury prevention and mental wellness.

The Whitepaper, launched today by icare Foundation General Manager Amanda Keogh, provides evidence that small business-owners and their workers are experiencing many stresses and that tailored supports specifically related to small business are limited, despite the fact small businesses represent 98 per cent of all trading businesses in NSW.

“The Whitepaper highlights an immediate need in NSW for new engagement tools for all small business-owners, especially those affected by mental ill-health, and the icare Foundation is already well-advanced in underwriting and designing a new pilot program that will include e-mental health strategies”, Ms Keogh said.

“There is a lack of tailored assistance for small business-owners and their workers who are living with significant levels of mental stress. By focusing on early intervention, we want to increase their access to prevention, wellbeing, treatment and peer-support options to improve wellness at work”, she said.

“We’re delighted to be partnering with **Everymind**, a leading institute dedicated to the prevention of mental ill-health, to help develop a program which we hope will be on-demand for all small businesses in NSW, and expect to scale to at least 7,000 small businesses in NSW over the next 12 months.

“The innovation around e-mental health is an exciting area for health professionals, as more user-friendly but sophisticated digital tools become available. We strongly believe this will make a significant difference to peoples’ lives”, Ms Keogh said.

Commenting on the findings of the report, Leanne Faulkner, a small business-owner and leading advocate for mental health support for Australians running small business, said: “The idea that small business-owners are always resilient, invincible, and living the easy life enjoying financial success is a myth. Small business ownership is like a rollercoaster ride – full of highs and inevitable lows.

“Caring for the mental health of the small business sector has been largely ignored up until now. It’s exciting to see this project addressing this gap with a planned approach that understands the realities of small business life and meets our needs in an easily accessible way”, Ms Faulkner said.

The research, released today, notes that many of the factors contributing to poor mental health were prevalent, if not unique, to the sector and include:

- A blurring of boundaries between home and work;
- Financial stress due to unpredictable income;
- Risk of business failure; and,
- Working in isolation.



For example, more than 85 per cent of respondents indicated they often take work home with them, and work-related problems kept them awake at night. For many, invoices are often paid late.

“There’s always another new pressure every day, whether it’s the rent being due or the registration on the company vehicles, the insurances being due; as well as the occasional bad client,” said one participant in the survey. “It’s the roll-on effect of never being able to get your head above water”.

The paper makes several recommendations to address these needs, including implementing a digital strategy to provide evidence-based prevention, treatment, and support programs for those at risk.

icare commissioned **Everymind** to author the report, and their Director, Jaelea Skehan, said: “The survey of small business-owners sends a very clear message – there is an immediate need to prioritise the mental health and wellbeing of small business and that e-mental health approaches may be particularly beneficial to many who work in them.

“Research data collected from small business owners and employees broadly supports the use of a digital-based strategy that is fit-for-purpose for small business, and able to respond to the diversity of the sector. The focus will be on assisting small businesses to identify their specific needs and to easily access evidence-based prevention, treatment, training, information, and support programs to meet those needs.

“Many small business owners talked about working long and irregular hours, often in isolation, and indicated that stigma was a barrier to accessing support. A strategy that uses digital tools, with the back-up of local services and networks, should help to overcome some of the barriers for small business – ensuring that supports are available when they need it and where they need it”, Ms Skehan said.

The icare Foundation, in conjunction with **Everymind**, is now in advanced planning for a trial of a comprehensive mental health strategy for small business that will include e-mental health as a central feature. The trial will be initially rolled out in Parramatta, Lake Macquarie and Singleton to determine how workers in metro, regional and rural areas utilise the service, and inform the development of the best solution for small business-owners. The team at **Everymind** will be running consultation workshops in all three areas in January 2018 and the full trial is due to commence in April next year.

The program will be underwritten by the icare Foundation, which made a \$1.1 million [investment](#) in **Everymind** earlier this year.

The initiative is informed and backed by a leadership group of senior executives from the fields of research, medicine, insurance and government representing **icare**, **Everymind**, the University of Newcastle, the NSW Small Business Commissioner, the NSW Mental Health Commission, the Council of Small Business Australia (COSBOA) and NSW small business-owners.

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About the icare Foundation

The icare Foundation is a new initiative and social venture of the NSW government’s insurance and care provider, [icare](#), to prevent injury and improve the mental wellbeing of people injured at work or on the road.

Launched in November 2016, the icare Foundation will invest \$100 million over five years focusing on new research, family support programs, and better partnerships with businesses and community organisations.

For more information, visit: <https://www.icare.nsw.gov.au/icare-foundation>

About Everymind

Everymind is a leading national Institute dedicated to reducing mental ill-health, reducing suicide and improving wellbeing.

Everymind has been delivering successful mental health and suicide prevention programs for over 25 years.

For more information, visit: <https://everymind.org.au>