

## The B Well Coalition – Our State of Mind Article in AFR – April 2023

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### When this executive gets depressed, everybody pitches in



**Sally Patten**, *BOSS editor*

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Cheryl Goodman has learnt to recognise the telltale signs that she is heading into a bout of depression.

Ms Goodman, senior manager of technical product development and regulatory affairs at supplements and wellness company Wanderlust, was diagnosed with depression two years ago, during the coronavirus pandemic that brought Melbourne, where she lives, to a virtual standstill.



“When I get into a depressive state, it’s a deep, deep fatigue,” says Wanderlust’s Cheryl Goodman. **Louis Trerise**

She gets “snappy” with people, feels “very, very” physically tired and can find making basic life decisions overwhelming.

“When I get into a depressive state, it’s a deep, deep fatigue. Sometimes I don’t have any physical capability to actually interact with people,” Ms Goodman, 36, added.

The executive is [one of millions of Australians suffering from depression, anxiety or other mental illnesses](#), which are estimated by Beyond Blue to cost businesses more than \$5.6 billion in lost productivity every year.

Figures from Beyond Blue show that one in 16 Australians – and one in 14 Australian women – is currently experiencing depression. One in seven Australians will experience depression in their lifetime, while 25 per cent of Australians will experience an anxiety condition in their lifetime. In addition, one in eight Australians is currently experiencing high or very high psychological distress.

## **Mental health day**

Ms Goodman manages her depression by ensuring she has sufficient downtime, which usually includes making no plans for at least one day on the weekend, regular visits to a psychologist, acupuncture sessions, taking medicinal plant St John's Wort, exercise and maintaining a routine.

"The other thing that I've had to get really good at is saying 'no'. It might be social things. It can be a workload situation," Ms Goodman added.

When she feels herself going downhill, the Melbourne-based executive doesn't hesitate to take a mental health day if she needs, or working from home, where she doesn't need to interact with anyone.

Alicia Miltins, director of people, performance and culture at Wanderlust, as well as family office Light Warrior Group, which has a majority stake in the supplements firm, said the company was able to accommodate employees suffering from mental illnesses, including by distributing their workload to other staff temporarily.

"Our number-one behaviour under our values on high performance is: 'Take care of yourself. You can't deliver your best unless you're at your best.'

"So we say, 'What can we do? How can we support you?' We do make workarounds. It's short-term pain for long-term gain," Ms Miltins said.

"It's been totally manageable for us. From a teamwork perspective, we're very much a pitch in culture. It's not a 'just my job' culture. It's everyone's job.

"When Cheryl's thriving, she's incredible. Her efficiency and her effectiveness when she's good far outweighs [times when] she needs a day," said Ms Miltins.

Wanderlust and Light Warrior, the family office of former Swisse chief executive Radek Sali, have participated in a pilot for a new assessment tool and platform, known as Our State of Mind, which aims to help employers understand the effectiveness of their [wellbeing initiatives](#) and provide insights and best practice recommendations.

Our State of Mind is a venture between a network of companies known as The B Well Coalition and research firm Ipsos Australia.

Employees of companies that participated in the pilot were asked to complete a 10-minute survey, the answers to which were used to assess the company's overall mental wellbeing culture and identify gaps.

Ms Miltins said Wanderlust and Light Warrior scored well, but there was an opportunity to improve workflows.

The human resources expert said that did not mean necessarily reducing workloads, but rather, changing operating rhythms and work alignment, and improving decision-making practices and communication "so people feel more calm and in control".

Our State of Mind will officially launch in mid-May with a survey.

“I would say mental health is probably one of the leading problems. If Australian corporates, organisations, government and many non-profits can get past it, I think it can have a significant benefit to the overall economic outcomes of the country and society,” said Gillian Cagney, president of Worley for Australia and New Zealand and a co-chairman of Our State of Mind.

“I think having a workplace where you have a [culture of mental wellbeing](#) can only be an attraction for organisations,” she said.

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*Support is available at Lifeline (13 11 14 and [lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au)) and beyondblue (1300 22 4636 and [beyondblue.org.au](http://beyondblue.org.au))*