

Small business and mental health

Tumut Small business chamber

Hazel Dalton

Senior Research Fellow (Rural Public Health), Rural Health Research Institute, Charles Sturt University

Honorary, Healthy Minds Program (HMRI), University of Newcastle

Adjunct Associate Professor, Mental Health Policy Unit, University of Canberra

What are we going to talk about today?

1. What good mental health and self-care looks like
2. Specific considerations for small business and mental health
3. Where to go to get help and support if needed



Ways to think about mental health - mental ill-health?

Depression

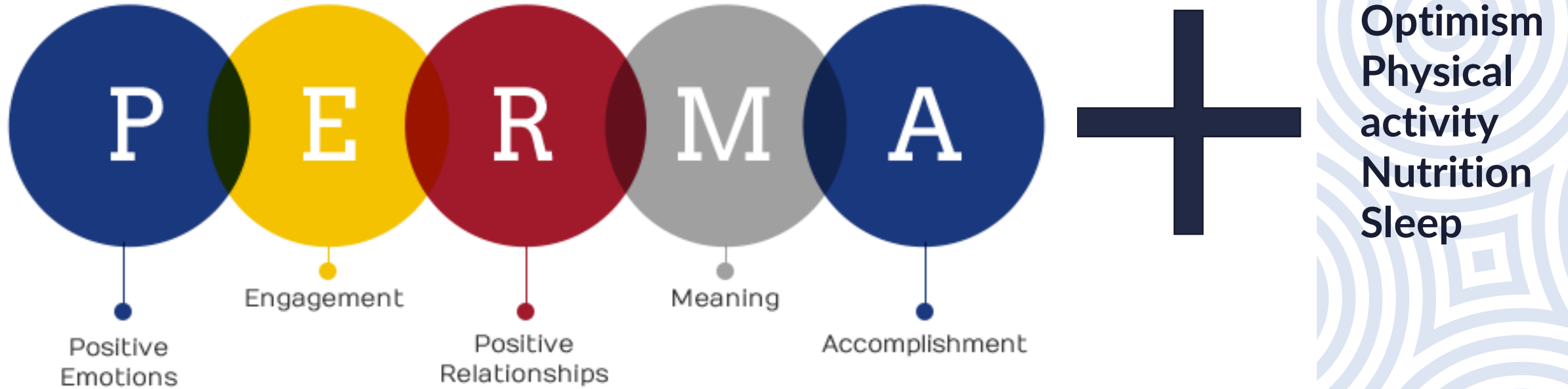
Anxiety

Addiction

Psychosis
Schizophrenia



Ways to think about mental health – mentally healthy



Positive psychology – Seligman

<https://positivepsychology.com/perma-model/#plus>

What can you do?

Sleep – Matt Walker - <https://www.sleepdiplomat.com/>

Body clock – get ~10 minutes morning sunlight no sunglasses to reset – [Huberman lab](#)

Watch intake of caffeine and alcohol

Regular walking helps build sleep pressure – you will get to sleep easier

Nutrition – Claire Collins – No money/No time -

<https://nomoneynotime.com.au/healthy-easy-recipes>

For me focus on eating five veg / two fruit, good protein, healthy fat.

Enjoy your food – I love to cook, to eat with others.

Movement (walking, cardio, resistance/weights) – [Ready State](#)

Build in habits you can stick to – what you like and fits in your routine.

For me – mornings.



We not me

Get and stay social – we are social mammals, and are biologically rewarded for being together. Our sense of safety is tied to this. Strong and weak ties matter.

Small businesses in communities like Tumut are reliable sources of social connection for members of the community

Loneliness is a major public health issue – puts us at risk of poor mental and physical health

A variety of sources of social connection and support can build resilience.



Meaning and purpose

Doing worthwhile things, even when they are hard.

Knowing what your values are – living by them

Reflect on your values – are they externally oriented?

Purpose can be indirect – earning money to put a roof over your family's head and food on the table is completely valid.

Giving, being generous and kind all matter.

This feeds our sense of wellbeing – eudamonia (more enduring).

Versus pleasure – hedonia (happy in the moment).



Engagement

Flow state – experience of deep immersion, focus, and intrinsic motivation in activities.

Feeling connected to your experience, you lose time.

Awe – connection to nature and wonder

Perspective - Cosmic insignificance theory

– [Oliver Burkeman](#) (4000 weeks - Time management for Mortals)

Don't forget to do things you enjoy.

Nature

Arts – music, visual arts, dancing etc

Find things that you find absorbing



Mental fitness

Training your mind – Mindfulness

– Sam Harris, [Waking Up](#), [Smiling Mind](#) (Australian). Calm. Insight Meditation Society.

What does it help with? Building the gap between stimulus and response
How we can respond instead of reacting.

Meditation is noticing how much your mind wanders and the act of bringing your attention back – repeated over time, it allows you to catch yourself.

Another kind of meditation that can change your reactivity is Meta – loving kindness meditation.



Mental fitness

Why do you need to practice? Because there are times when will power and logic goes out the window.

HALT – hungry, angry, lonely, tired – your prefrontal cortex goes offline
(Judson Brewer)



Self-compassion

Self-compassion

Try a different fuel – if you have a strong inner critic and tend to use fear as a fuel source – it might be hard to imagine, but others have found other sources – love, curiosity, creativity – leave a less toxic residue. The inner critic doesn't help – but you can thank them for having your best interest at heart...

Kristin Neff - <https://self-compassion.org/>



Mental health in the workforce

You are the most important part of your small business, your employees are next. Taking care of your mental health is a business investment. It is also part of your work health and safety obligations – how is your work environment set up to support your mental health?

For rural small businesses and their mental health –

- Business integration with community and owner identity
- Different financial pressures
- Options for specialised support and casual relief

These factors can support or challenge our mental health depending on context.



Planning ahead – make better decisions in tough times

We know that our decision making capacity is degraded when we are subject to prolonged stress/adversity – e.g. drought, the pandemic

Planning ahead can help – even if the plans need to be adapted, have contingencies

There are tools – Ahead for business - <https://aheadforbusiness.org.au/>
Planning tool – incorporate mental health into business planning

Adaptive capacity – when we are flexible, have plans and can adapt to circumstances – we are best placed to respond.

Take care of each other

The beauty of small town is that everyone knows everyone, we can help each other.

It is also a challenge – loss of privacy, everyone knows your business, you can't just switch off – means you need to pay special attention to filling your own cup and staying well.



Links to support

Ahead for business - [Ahead for Business: Mental health support for small business](#)

New Access for small business - [NewAccess for Small Business Owners \(NASBO\) | Beyond Blue](#)

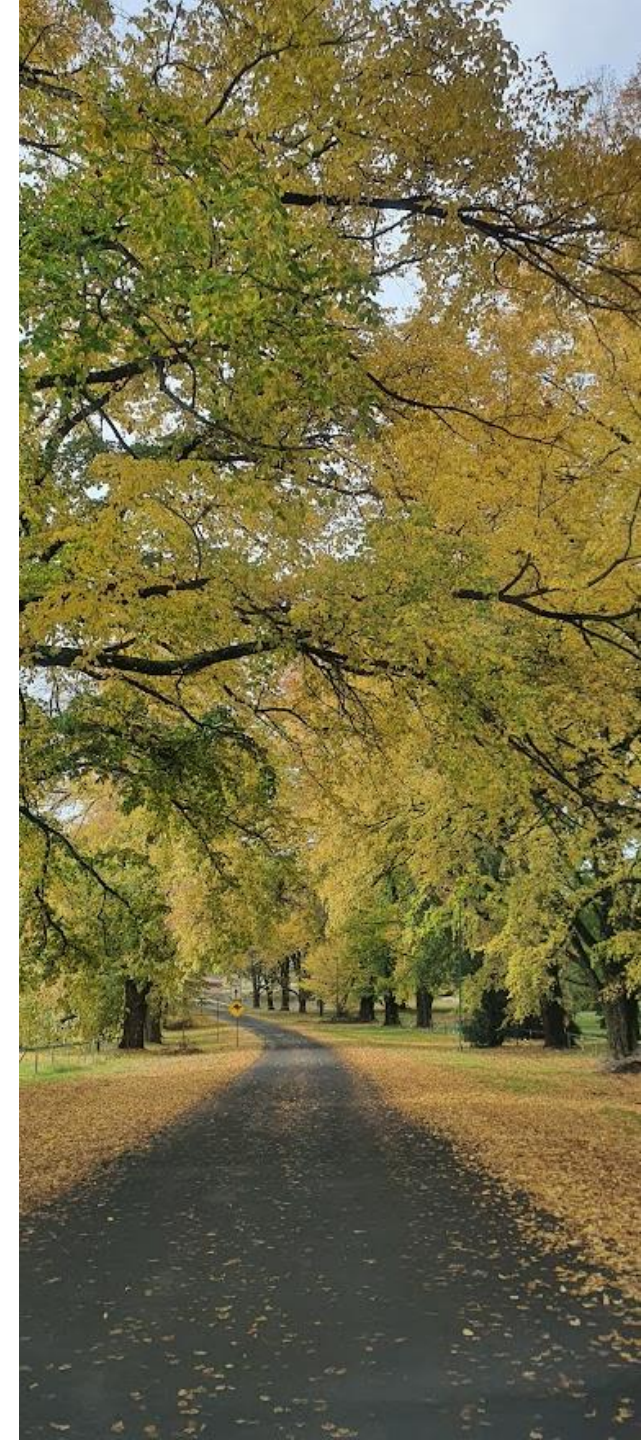
[Mind Spot](#) – free clinical support – online, phone, by post

[Head to Health](#) – government site – lots of help and links

Rural Adversity Mental Health Program – <https://www.ramhp.com.au/>

Local coordinator - Aimee Makeham, based in Wagga

Aimee.Makeham@health.nsw.gov.au 0428 249 719





Thank you

Hazel Dalton

Rural Health Research Institute

CSU

hdalton@csu.edu.au

Acknowledgements

Centre for Rural and Remote Mental
Health – University of Newcastle

University of Canberra – Mental Health
Policy Unit

Q&A – additional thoughts and resources - workplaces

WHS responsibility - <https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/hazards-a-z/mental-health>
<https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/safety-starts-here/mental-health-at-work-the-basics>

‘[How are you going?](https://www.crrmh.com.au/downloadable-resources/)’ poster - <https://www.crrmh.com.au/downloadable-resources/> - try them in communal spaces, on the backs of toilet doors.

Training – consider Mental Health First Aid for leaders and first aid reps. For the rest, consider Workplace Support Skills - <https://www.ramhp.com.au/training/>

Why? – common understanding and language around mental health, reduce stigma, increase ability to recognise distress and access care.

<https://mentallyhealthyworkplacealliance.org.au/our-work/>

<https://aheadforbusiness.org.au/>

Breathing to change how you feel and how you respond

Also – breathing – to change your physiological state (i.e. stress reduction)

The physiological sigh (very effective, easy)

How to video: [Breathing Techniques to Reduce Stress and Anxiety | Dr. Andrew Huberman on the Physiological Sigh - YouTube](#)

[Brief structured respiration practices enhance mood and reduce physiological arousal - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#) (the evidence)