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Advisory on employees' mental well-being launched in Singapore

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FIONA LAM fiolam@sph.com.sg [@FionaLamBT](https://twitter.com/FionaLamBT)

Workplaces that promote employees' mental well-being are more likely to see increased productivity and reduced absenteeism. ST FILE PHOTO

An advertisement for the 2021 Alibaba Cloud Summit. The ad features the Alibaba Cloud logo at the top, followed by the text "2021 ALIBABA CLOUD SUMMIT LIVE!". Below this, it says "ACCELERATE DIGITALIZATION" and "ALIBABA CLOUD SUMMIT LIVE!". The date and time are listed as "June 8, 2021 | 14:00 - 17:30 (GMT+8)". A prominent orange button says "Sign up Now". The background is a stylized orange and white graphic.

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EMPLOYERS, employees and self-employed persons can now tap on resources from a new tripartite advisory on mental well-being at workplaces.

Issued by the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) and the Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF), the advisory also sets out practical guidance on measures that employers can adopt to support their workers' mental well-being.

Key recommendations for employers include appointing mental wellness champions to raise staff's awareness on mental well-being and mental health conditions through talks and workshops.

Employers are also encouraged to provide access to counselling services, such as Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs), which allow workers to speak to a professional on their work and non-work-related challenges.

EAP service providers include The Centre for Psychology, Singapore Counselling Centre, Human Dynamic, and the Singapore Anglican Community Services Integrated Employment Services.

In addition, employers may train managers to spot signs of mental distress and on where they can refer employees to seek help from.

Agencies that offer mental health training include the Health Promotion Board (HPB), which provides workshops for leaders, supervisors, those in human resources roles and employees. Companies can also tap on HPB's Workplace Outreach Wellness package to implement health promotion programmes for staff on a co-funding basis.

Other training providers include the Singapore Association for Mental Health, Silver Ribbon (Singapore), Viriya Community Services, and Clarity Singapore.

And outside work hours, employees need to have adequate rest - employers should establish a work-life harmony policy to provide clarity on after-hours work communication, according to the advisory.

Meanwhile, where possible, employees and self-employed persons are encouraged to also look after their own mental well-being and reach out for help if they feel overwhelmed.

The launch of the advisory on Tuesday comes as work-from-home arrangements have increasingly become the norm amid the coronavirus outbreak, with employees feeling more stressed and facing a higher risk of burnout as a result.

A [negative work environment can affect employees' mental health](#), said MOM, NTUC and SNEF in a press statement. Conversely, workplaces that promote their mental well-being are more likely to see increased productivity and reduced absenteeism, the trio added.

The tripartite partners said that they developed the advisory in consultation with human resources practitioners as well as social agencies.

The advisory will hopefully kickstart more pervasive adoption of the recommended measures, especially with the disruptions brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, said MOM, NTUC and SNEF.

Melvin Yong, NTUC assistant secretary-general, noted that the tripartite advisory will help reassure workers that safeguards are in place to support their mental well-being, and in particular benefit those at risk of workplace burnout.

In a Facebook post, Mr Yong urged employers to give their staff sufficient time to rest and recharge for the next working day. Citing examples listed in the advisory, he encouraged supervisors not to expect an immediate response to work-related WhatsApp or Telegram messages or e-mails sent after work hours, if the matters are not critical or urgent.

When sending non-critical or non-urgent messages and e-mails, supervisors could also include a header to state that no immediate response is expected from the recipient.

The labour movement is committed to working with its unionised companies to adopt the recommendations, and to partner employers and the government to strengthen support at workplaces, he said.

Mr Yong added that many workers have been facing greater stress during the current prolonged period of telecommuting work arrangements, as they juggle work and personal commitments while adapting to Covid-19 guidelines and restrictions.

Gary Khoo, HPB director of preventive health programmes, said that with mental wellness programmes, staff can pick up coping skills to manage the challenges they face at work. This will help create a supportive environment to better engage workers, he noted.