MENTAL HEALTH
MATTERS

A guide to **ending mental health stigma** in the workplace

Who is this booklet for?

See Change has identified the workplace as a key setting for social change around attitudes to mental health problems to take place. This guide is aimed at employers and employees who want to create a workplace culture where everyone feels comfortable having open and honest conversations about mental health.

After reading this booklet, you will be able to;

- Understand what mental health stigma is
- Be able to recognise stigmatising behaviours in the workplace
- Be equipped with the tools to challenge stigma in the workplace
- Understand more about the legislation in relation to mental health in the workplace
- Be comfortable talking about mental health in the workplace

A note of thanks

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to this booklet, including our See Change Ambassadors – people who share their lived experiences of living with a mental health difficulty – and our Workplace Programme partners.

We would also like to thank our funders at St. John of God Hospital and the HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention, without their support we wouldn't be able to continue the work we do.

HSE   Connecting for Life   Saint John of God Hospital

A full list of resources can be found at the end of this guide

Contents

Connecting for Life

About See Change

See Change is Ireland's national mental health stigma reduction partnership. Its work is informed by people with lived experiences of mental health difficulties, including its 50+ Ambassadors, who are best placed to give insight into mental health stigma and discrimination.

See Change run the annual national Green Ribbon campaign which aims to prompt conversations about mental health to end stigma and discrimination. Wearing a Green Ribbon – an international symbol of mental health awareness – shows others that you are open to starting positive conversations about mental health.

See Change has developed a six-step pledge programme to help Irish workplaces create an open culture around mental health and play a role in challenging mental health stigma. The programme includes workshops, templates and a suite of resource documents to help organisations and staff implement real change.

It is See Change's vision that every person in Ireland can be open and positive about mental health, understanding that it as a normal part of life's ups and downs.

See Change is a project of Shine, along with Headline, Ireland's national media programme for responsible reporting and representation of mental ill health and suicide. Shine is a national organisation that provides information and support for people affected by mental health difficulties and their families.

Shine
Supporting people affected by mental ill health

See Change
The National Mental Health Stigma Reduction Partnership

HEADLINE
Supporting media, changing attitudes

A full list of resources can be found at the end of this guide

See Change's Values

Equality

People affected by mental health problems are entitled to the same human rights as everyone else in society without discrimination.

Inclusivity

Our work is inclusive of the voices of lived experience. We work closely with our Ambassadors to create a disruptive social movement to end mental health stigma.
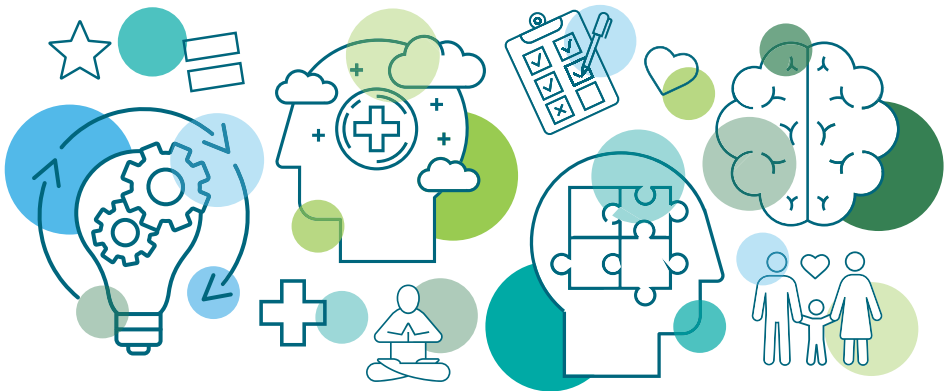
Empowerment

We endeavour towards a society where people with lived experience of mental health difficulties can live self-determined lives free from stigma and discrimination.

Openness

Our work is accessible, understanding and compassionate.

Dignity

Our actions are driven by the desire to maintain, promote and enhance the lives of all.

What stigma looks like

Mental health stigma is the shame that is placed on a person who lives with a mental health difficulty. Often it will involve the use of negative labels to identify people as different, and can result in a person feeling devalued, ashamed and isolated.

Stigma is recognised as a barrier to the recovery process, with many people choosing to conceal their illness for fear of being labelled as mentally ill. It has also been identified as one of the most difficult aspects of living with a mental health issue.

To challenge and reduce mental health stigma and discrimination, we must first understand how it develops and is maintained.

There are two types of mental health stigma:

Public stigma

Public stigma is when a person is stigmatised because they have a mental health difficulty. It involves the unfair **stereotyping**, **prejudices** and **discrimination** of a person with mental health issues, that negatively impacts that person's self-esteem and can lead them to delay seeking treatment.

STEREOTYPING
Stereotyping is having a fixed, over-generalised belief about a particular group or class of people. By stereotyping we presume that a person has a whole range of characteristics and abilities that we assume all members of that group have.

PREJUDICE
Prejudice is having a preconceived opinion of a person or group of people that is not based on reason or actual experience.

DISCRIMINATION
Discrimination is the unjust or negative treatment of different categories of people, based on the grounds of ethnicity, age, sex, or disability.

An example of public stigma is an employee who does not want to work with a colleague because they have opened up to them about having a mental health difficulty.

A full list of resources can be found at the end of this guide

Have you ever avoided having a conversation with someone because you know they have mental health difficulties?

Why do you think you behaved like this?

While we all have subconsciously pre-judged others at some point in our lives, it's important to remember not to act on these thoughts or feelings.

Self stigma

Self-stigma is when a person starts to believe the myths and misconceptions that society and the media places on mental health difficulties to be true. Examples of these myths and misconceptions include:

▍ **People with mental health difficulties can't hold down a job**

▍ **People with mental health difficulties are dangerous**

▍ **People with mental health difficulties do not recover**

Not everyone with a mental health difficulty will experience self-stigma.

As a result of self-stigma, people with mental health difficulites may withdraw socially and suffer from low self-esteem and a lack of confidence.

> *"My stigma was self-imposed when it came to my mental health. Having had two close colleagues die by suicide within a short space of time, I listened to all the gossip and talk after their deaths. A lot of the talk within work surrounding their deaths was very negative towards the individuals. I felt that if I opened up to anyone in work about my own mental health then I would be thought of in the same negative way."*

Keith Dore, See Change Ambassador

Stigma in the workplace

Worryingly, across Irish workplaces:

1 in **5** workers believe that mental health stigma is prevalent in their workplace

Over **7** in **10** workers are concerned that disclosing a mental health issue could impact their job

2 in **5** workers have witnessed some form of stigmatising behaviour in the workplace

The majority of people believe that mental health issues can have a negative effect on many elements of job performance and career development. In fact, there is a fear among many workers that disclosing a mental illness will result in a person:

Being treated differently by colleagues ———— **71%**

Being passed over for promotions ———— **47%**

Being unable to come to work ———— **40%**

Being excluded from talks/meetings ———— **37%**

These fears are strongly associated with mental health stigma and are predominately felt by women and those aged 55-64.

55% There is also a perception that those suffering with mental health difficulties are less "reliable", although some workers do acknowledge that suffering such issues can boost a person's fortitude and resilience.

A full list of resources can be found at the end of this guide

> "Being passed over for a promotion because someone senior feels you wouldn't be able to cope due to a history of mental health difficulties can make you feel angry both at them and at yourself. It can also make you feel so ashamed and embarrassed that you don' t put yourself forward for any more promotions."

Claire Kane, See Change Ambassador

> "A staff member once told me privately that their previous manager warned them that I could not be trusted because I was unstable and 'not playing with a full deck'. Naturally, I was very shocked and was initially very angry. However, I realised that that particular manager was very insecure and generally sought to progress by making others look bad."

Adrian Yeates, See Change Ambassador

Put yourself in the shoes of someone with a mental health difficulty. How would you feel if someone treated you differently or excluded you from meetings or projects because you have disclosed your mental health issue?

To reduce the stigma and discrimination associated with mental health difficulties, organisations must create a culture of awareness, where employers and employees can have open and honest conversations about mental health and seek further support without fear of judgement.

Why the words we use matter

There are lots of words and phrases that have been embedded into our everyday language that can, without our knowledge, reinforce negative stereotypes.

Some of the stigmatising words and phrases include:	Here's some of the words and phrases we should use instead:
" The traffic was **mental** today "	" The traffic was **terrible** today "
" It's **mad** busy at work "	" Work is really **stressful** "
" The client is so difficult to deal with, they are **psycho** "	" The client is **struggling** to make up their mind "
" The weather is so **bipolar** "	" The weather is so **unpredictable** "
" Work is driving me **insane** "	" It's **incredibly** busy at work "
" You may have noticed from my organised desk, I'm a little **OCD** "	" You may have noticed from my desk, **I like to keep things in order** "

While our intentions are never to hurt or upset our colleagues, we need to be mindful that these words and phrases can be a trigger for someone with a mental health difficulty who may have been labelled with these words previously. It may cause them to feel both ashamed and isolated. Trivialising these words may even lead to a person choosing to conceal their difficulty.

Additonally, people who have been diagnosed with a specific mental illness are often labelled with their diagnosis. We wouldn't say 's/he is cancer,' so why do we say 's/he is depressed' or 's/he is bipolar'?

People with mental illnesses should not be defined by their illness. Instead, we should say 's/he has depression' or 's/he has bipolar disorder.'
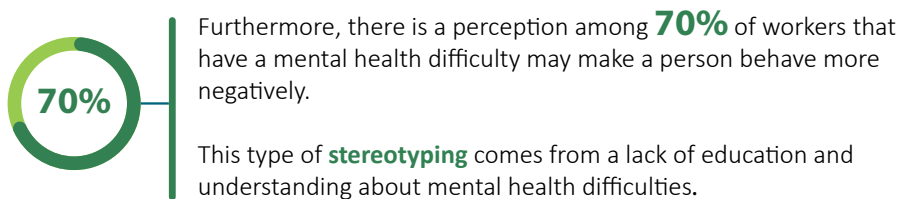
It is important that we all challenge our own use of language and encourage our colleagues, friends and families to do the same.
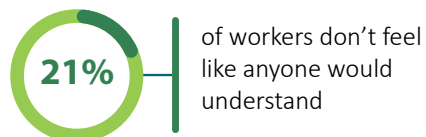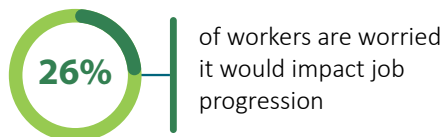
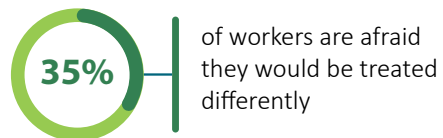A full list of resources can be found at the end of this guide

The impact of stigma

The majority of workers **(74%)** believe that having a mental health issue negatively impacts a person's job performance. A lot of the time, this perception is based wholly on **prejudices**, without any supporting evidence that having a mental health difficulty affects a person's ability to do their job.

79% of workers also believe that having a mental health difficulty may increase a person's sick leave. This **prejudice** can lead to colleagues being resentful of the person with a mental health difficulty because they believe that they will have to pick up that person's workload.

70%

Furthermore, there is a perception among **70%** of workers that have a mental health difficulty may make a person behave more negatively.

This type of **stereotyping** comes from a lack of education and understanding about mental health difficulties.

It's no wonder that over half would feel uncomfortable disclosing mental health issues in the workplace due to the following:

40% of workers are worried about being judged or labelled

35% of workers are afraid they would be treated differently

26% of workers are worried it would impact job progression

21% of workers don't feel like anyone would understand

Encouragingly however, just **over half of workers** feel their workplace is equipped to support employees with mental health issues. Though many say that workplaces are noticeably less able to deal with those with complex mental illnesses like schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or psychosis.

"We have made great strides in acknowledging anxiety and high functioning depression but a lack of knowledge and a certain amount of stigma results in workplaces shying away from discussing more complex or chronic mental illnesses and difficulties."

Claire Kane, See Change Ambassador

"Being treated differently by colleagues feels isolating and pushes you away from the group making you feel more alone. It puts the idea in your head that it is safer to be alone and never open up. It also breeds mistrust with other work colleagues."

Keith Dore, See Change Ambassador

Linda Garvin, See Change Ambassador

"If I am standing at the bottom of a stairs beside Jane who is in a wheelchair, getting to the top of that stairs is far more difficult, perhaps impossible, for Jane than it is for me. Jane can also provide medical evidence (x ray or MRI) as to why she cannot get to the top of the stairs without additional resources and support. It is likely that Jane's manager and colleagues will discuss how to accommodate her needs and try to support her.

"John has bipolar disorder but he cannot provide a medical test result to prove he has a mental health difficulty and that he needs additional resources and support to overcome his difficulties. It is less likely that John's manager and colleagues will understand his perspective. It is unlikely that his illness and the challenges it brings will be openly discussed with him."

"Both people are struggling but treated very differently."

"Workplaces talk about wellness and mental health. Workplaces do not talk about mental illness and how that feels so different depending on the illness and the individual."

A full list of resources can be found at the end of this guide

While there are many negative perceptions about having a mental health difficulty, some positive recognitions to having a mental health difficulty were identified, including increasing a person's:

50%

Coping skills

55%

Resilience

60%

Empathy

These attributes better enable workers to manage the pressures and stresses of work life, as well increase the person's ability to be understanding and supportive when a colleague is struggling.

The importance of workplace mental health programmes

86%

With an overwhelming majority of workers feeling that having open conversations about mental health in the workplace is appropriate and a further three in four workers agreeing that workplaces should prioritise reducing mental health stigma, it's clear that there is an appetite in the workplace for such programmes to be rolled-out.

But worryingly, across many workplaces that are already providing mental health programmes, a lack of communication around what these programmes are is preventing lots of employees from participating, with cynicism, embarrassment and fear of stigmatisation being the main barriers.

Essentially, many employees worry that being associated with mental health or wellbeing programmes may give the perception that they have a mental illness or difficulty and will be judged for attending.

For workplaces, this results in low attendance at mental health programmes and a poor uptake of **Employee Assistance Programmes** (i.e., due to the fear of lack of confidentiality), as well as a missed opportunity to educate their workforce on mental health difficulties and put an end to mental health stigma and discrimination.

> **An employee assistance program (EAP) assists employees with personal problems and/or work-related problems that may impact their job performance, health, mental and emotional well-being. They usually offer free and confidential assessments, short-term counselling, referrals, and follow-up services for employees.**

Those organisations that effectively communicate and rollout mental health initiatives are benefiting from:

- **Workers feeling more comfortable to talk openly about mental health**
- **An increase in organisational and individual wellbeing**
- **A reduction in absenteeism**
- **Enhanced employee stress management skills**
- **Reduced costs associated with absenteeism, employee relation issues**
- **Talent retention and acquisition**
- **Better systems to support employees with mental health difficulties**

Alma Healy, AIB

"In AIB Homes Commercial, we have really started to notice a difference in our people's willingness to openly and honestly talk about their mental health and any challenges they might be having, and equally people are responding very positively and supportively to this. This change has come about gradually due to consistent focus at both team and management level. We have 17 wellbeing champions across all of our teams and each people leader has committed to having mental health on the agenda at team meetings on a regular basis. At our quarterly recognition event there were two awards given out in relation to mental health and people's support of same. This shows a positive shift in culture to see these awards given out alongside awards for performance."

**Alma Healy,
Commercial Delivery People Enablement, AIB**

A full list of resources can be found at the end of this guide

> "1/3rd of our life is spent at work and battling with fear of judgement, which is not only counterproductive but also physically damaging. To remain in a leadership role, it is often expected of you to be emotionally intelligent and mental illness can be considered a major weakness. Candor, education and support at the workplace is fundamental for health and performance."

Knowing your rights as an employee

50%

There is currently a lack of knowledge among employees about the legislation surrounding mental health in the workplace, **with just half** of workers aware that mental health falls under the Health and Safety at Work Act.

60%

Moreover, many workers did not know that mental health is covered under legislation and the nine grounds of discrimination (disability).

Under the Employment Equality Act, the nine grounds of discrimination are:

- Gender
- Family status
- Civil status
- Sexual orientation
- Religion
- Age
- Disability
- Race
- Being a member of the Traveller community

Equality law is also there to protect workers and ensure everyone in the workplace is treated fairly. **Reasonable accommodation** is an important concept in equality law which says that employers are obliged to make appropriate measures so that employees who have a disability- including people with experience of a mental health problem- can access, participate and advance in employment.

All measures should be taken in consultation with the employee and should also be reasonable for the organisation.

Examples of reasonable accommodation include:

Adjusting working hours

Adjusting tasks

Providing time off to attend counselling/medical appointments

Phased return to work after someone has been on sick leave

"In the role I'm in now I feel totally supported, more than I have in any other role. A flexible attitude to work times and location makes me feel more in control and capable when I have bad days and my manager is so empathetic when it comes to dealing with things like grief and illness."

Claire Kane, See Change Ambassador

Workplaces need to get better at informing employees that legislation is there to protect workers with mental health difficulties.

You can find out more information on employment law and mental health at the back of this booklet.

A full list of resources can be found at the end of this guide

What workplaces need to be doing more of

It is apparent that workers feel that having a mental health issue is detrimental to their careers – be it in terms of being treated differently to being passed over for promotions or even being excluded.

To alleviate these fears, it is vital that organisations put programmes and initiatives in place to reduce mental health stigma in the workplace and create a culture where everyone can speak openly and honestly about mental health.

While lots of workplaces have made some progress towards ending mental health stigma in their organisations, many are just beginning their journey.

To bring about social change around attitudes to mental health problems, there are a number of things that organisations can do:

Educate your employees

> *"Personally, I feel that it comes down to a lack of knowledge or understanding of mental illness. We fear what we don't know and therefore avoid dealing with issues that might be taboo or 'too complicated'. Regrettably, some leaders in the workplace still buy in to the myth that only 'strong' people succeed, so they dare not acknowledge any perceived weakness or vulnerability."*

Adrian Yeates, See Change Ambassador

Education is key when it comes to reducing mental health stigma in the workplace. It's important to educate your staff about:

- **The different types of mental illnesses and the recovery process**
- **How to challenge stigma and discrimination in the workplace**
- **A reduction in absenteeism**
- **How to start conversations about mental health with colleagues**
- **The policies and procedures relevant to mental health in your workplace**
- **The different laws and legislation related to mental health, including the Employment Equality Act**
- **The supports provided for employees by your workplace**

www.seechange.ie   f SeeChangeIreland   🐦 SeeChangeIRL   📷 SeeChangeIRL

Take a minute to write down what you know about each of the following mental illnesses:

Schizophrenia   **Schizoaffective disorder**

Bipolar disorder   **Severe depression**   **Psychosis**

To find out more about these mental illnesses, and to see if there's anything you missed or made assumptions about, visit www.shine.ie/information/

!

Reminder: You don't have to be an expert to speak to someone about their mental illness - a willingness to be open and learn more about mental illnesses is enough.

Provide manager support

Managers can support their employees who have a mental health difficulty by:

- **Taking time to talk to the person privately - ask them if something is wrong but take your steer from them**

- **Being honest in assessing the employee's recent performance**

- **Not making assumptions on what someone can and can't do**

- **Asking the person what would help them at work - find out what reasonable accommodation means and what the law says**

- **Treating them with respect (in the language you use and the attention you give to them) and act as a role model to encourage other colleagues to do the same**

- **Suggesting that the individual asks for advice from their occupational health advisor or contact any supports provided for employees by the workplace**

- **Keeping the dialogue going (where both parties agree in advance, this can apply when a person is on sick leave)**

A full list of resources can be found at the end of this guide

Roll-out and communicate employee mental health programmes

Mental health programmes enable workplaces to create an open culture around mental health and play a role in challenging mental health stigma.

There's a variety of workplace programmes and initiatives that many organisations today are implementing to raise awareness about mental health and bring about real change within their organisations, including:

Mental Health First Aid Ireland training course
www.mhfaireland.ie/

Work Well Ireland's workshops
www.workwellireland.ie

Health Ireland's 'Healthy Workplace' initiative
www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/healthy-ireland/

Employee Assistance Plan (EAP) services

? Ask your employer about your organisations EAP services

"Looking after the mental health and wellbeing of our people is the smart thing to do, it's the legal thing to do and it's the right thing to do. The days of bean bags and fruit bowls masquerading as wellbeing programmes is over. Organisations that invest time and effort in a structured and strategic continuous improvement process for the wellbeing of their people will find that their people will invest time and effort in their business."

Brian Crooke, Workplace Wellbeing Ireland

See Change has developed the following six-step workplace pledge to help end mental health stigma in the workplace:

1 Train management

HR, senior leadership and line managers take part in See Change-led workshops that explore the topic of mental health and stigma.

2 Devleop mental health policy

Develop mental health policy and implement it across the organisation.

3 Train & inform staff

Host training & events for mental health awareness, Green Ribbon campaign, wellness workshops etc.

4 Empower staff champions

Nominate, train and support staff champions to promote wellness & challenge stigma in the workplace.

5 Engage your network

Encourage everyone across your organisation to promote mental health awareness with your external network.

6 Earn your certificate

Your organisation will then become a See Change workplace and your name and logo will be displayed on our company's website.

Since 2015, over 200 organisations across Ireland have completed the See Change workplace programme.

Listening to the voices of people with lived experiences of mental health difficulties share their story is one of the best ways to open minds about mental health difficulties and encourage workers to have open and honest conversations.

See Change also offers:

Lived experience talks

See Change has 50+ ambassadors who have been trained to responsibly tell their story about living with a mental health difficulty.

To book a lived experience talk for your workplace, email: workplace@seechange.ie

A full list of resources can be found at the end of this guide

> *"We recently held an event hosted by a See Change Ambassador and it was truly wonderful to see how our people spoke so openly to such a large audience. It was an emotional event which clearly showed that people needed and appreciated such a forum. Senior leaders in our organisation led the way with their personal stories which paved the way for others to know that it was ok to open up."*
>
> **Alma Healy, Commercial Delivery People Enablement, AIB**

Stigma presentations

See Change offers a 1-hour presentation on stigma given by a trained Ambassador to help employees to:

- **Understand what stigma is**
- **Highlight the difference between public and self-stigma**
- **Educate workers about the language of mental health stigma**
- **Showcase where stigma shows up in the workplace and in society**
- **Share tips for challenging stigma**

To book a stigma presentation, email: workplace@seechange.ie

Checklist for workplaces for embedding a culture of having open and honest conversations about mental health in the workplace:

- ✓ Provide easy access to relevant policies and procedures
- ✓ Make sure all staff understand procedures
- ✓ Make all staff aware of what's included under their Employee Assistance Plan (EAP), including highlighting how these plans are completely confidential
- ✓ Schedule formal check-ins with staff
- ✓ Informal/ad-hoc check-ins with staff
- ✓ Events to raise awareness and promote mental health in the workplace, e.g., for Green Ribbon- See Change's annual month-long campaign to end mental health stigma and discrimination
- ✓ Provide staff wellbeing days

www.seechange.ie **f** SeeChangeIreland **t** SeeChangeIRL **○** SeeChangeIRL

Whether you are a manger or an employee, it everyone's responsibility to have better conversations about mental health and become informed about how to be supportive of someone struggling with a mental health difficulty.

But remember, the conversation shouldn't end after you've had an event or completed a mental health programme. Conversations about mental health should be embedded into the workplace culture, with employees at all levels feeling comfortable to discuss mental health openly with colleagues at any time.

> "Fundamentally, a workplace should support its employees with their wellbeing – full stop. Research shows that productivity increases when employees feel recognised and supported in the workplace. Unfortunately, stigma still plays a role for mental health, so companies need to work harder to create an environment where employees feel safe discussing their mental health BEFORE it becomes an illness."
>
> **Adrian Yeates, See Change Ambassador**

You don't need to have all the answers. Simply listening to a person who is struggling with their mental health can make a huge difference.

It is also important to look after your own mental health. Try some of the following self-care tips to improve your mental health:

Exercise - go for a walk or head to the gym

Eat healthily - improves wellbeing and mood

Switch off from work - listen to a podcast or read a book

Take time to reflect - write down your thoughts and feelings

Remember to take screen breaks while working - take a 5 minute screen break every hour

Don't skip lunch - make sure to step away from your workspace for lunch

Have regular check ins with your colleagues - this could be a quick message or a call

Give yourself the time to pause before starting your next meeting - a minute can be enough to catch your breath

? **Which of these tips are you going to start doing to maintain good mental health?**

A full list of resources can be found at the end of this guide

Useful resources

See Change booklets about equality and mental health law in the workplace and other See Change workplace booklets:
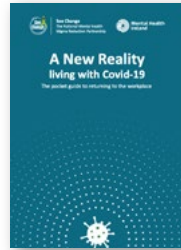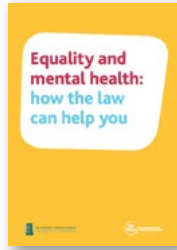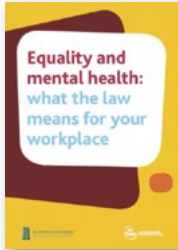
These booklets are available to download at www.seechange.ie/publications/

Organisations who have signed up to the See Change workplace programme will also get access to a suite of downloadable resources and documents.

Additional online resources about equality and mental health law in the workplace:

🌐 www.equality.ie

🌐 https://www.ihrec.ie/guides-and-tools/human-rights-and-equality-for-employers/what-does-the-law-say/eea-summary/

Employers for Change
Empower employers with all the information and advice needed to hire, employ, manage and retain staff with disabilities:
https://www.employersforchange.ie/

AHEAD
Work to create inclusive environments in education and employment for people with disabilities:
https://www.ahead.ie/

IHREC
Share information and resources in relation to employment law and discrimination:
https://www.ihrec.ie/

Shine:
www.shine.ie

HSE:
www.yourmentalhealth.ie

Samaritans:
Freephone 116 123
(available 24/7)

Pieta House:
Freephone 1800 247 247
or text HELP to 51444

www.seechange.ie   SeeChangeIreland   SeeChangeIRL   SeeChangeIRL

See Change is working positively to reduce the stigma and discrimination associated with mental health problems and to ensure that everyone enjoys the same rights on an equal basis.

www.seechange.ie

DOC
Block B
Maynooth Business Campus
Straffan Road
Maynooth
Co. Kildare
W23W5X7

For more information on the See Change Workplace Programme, email: workplace@seechange.ie