

THRIVE

An industry-led wellness initiative for the veterinary profession.



Cultivating Safe Teams

Creating a mentally healthy and safe veterinary team

Pilot program final report – June 2025



Contents

Acknowledgements	Page 3
Executive Summary	Page 4
Part 1 – The Journey to Cultivating Safe Teams	Page 6
Introduction.....	Page 6
Veterinary Wellness Research.....	Page 6
THRIVE – Veterinary Wellness Initiative.....	Page 7
Industry Round Table.....	Page 7
Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework.....	Page 8
Part 2 – Cultivating Safe Teams Pilot Overview	Page 10
Introduction.....	Page 10
Pilot Design and Delivery.....	Page 15
Pilot Participating Workplaces.....	Page 16
Post Workshop Support.....	
Part 3 – Cultivating Safe Teams Pilot Outcomes	Page 18
Introduction.....	Page 18
Evaluation Design.....	Page 18
Evaluation Results.....	Page 20
Summary.....	Page 24
Part 4 – Cultivating Safe Teams Train-the-Trainer	Page 26
Introduction.....	Page 26
Purpose and Intent.....	Page 26
Design and Delivery.....	Page 27
Train-the-Trainer Evaluation.....	Page 27
Conclusion	Page 29
Appendix 1	Page 30
Appendix 2	Page 31

Acknowledgements

This report on the Cultivating Safe Teams (CST) pilot program outlines the joint effort between the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) and Aspect Group to positively impact the mental health and wellbeing of the Veterinary Profession by building capability of the workforce to influence change from the inside of every veterinary workplace.

It is important to acknowledge and thank all current and former individuals who have worked within the Veterinary Profession and felt the deep impact of veterinary work, be that through positive impacts, rewards and experiences or those parts of work that can be challenging, carry high emotional load or detract from our wellbeing as individuals.

Special thanks to the 735 people that participated in the Cultivating Safe Teams pilot program across 2023 and 2024 as well as those attending at the 2025 AVA Conference and Train-the-Trainer Program. Every individual who contributed to this important pilot openly shared their mental health experiences, insights related to workplace risks and protective factors, as well as ideas for the future of the Veterinary Profession.

The THRIVE Veterinary Wellness initiative has allowed Cultivating Safe Teams to be born, and this industry led initiative shows the solid commitment to wellness across the profession driven by AVA.

Thank you to the THRIVE Steering Committee made up of Dr Diana Barker, Rosie Overfield, Dr Michael Paton, Dr Benton Smith, Dr Bruce Smith, Anna Dawson, Rebecca Coventry, Dr Cathy Warburton and Dr Debbie Neutze, without their passion for creating a thriving veterinary profession today and in the future the CST program would not have been possible, their early and ongoing contributions to bringing CST to life have been invaluable.

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My genuine thanks go to the profession as a whole for intrusting CST in my hands and welcoming me into your world.



Carly Webster – Head of Advisory Aspect Group (Lead CST Facilitator).



Carly Webster after the very last CST session in South Australia, having travelled 55,000 km's

Executive summary

Cultivating Safe Teams for and with the profession

In 2021 the Superfriend Veterinary Wellness research served as an important vehicle for launching the dedicated veterinary wellness initiative THRIVE of which CST was born which aims to give veterinary workplaces the skills and tools to tackle psychosocial factors in their own workplaces to improve mental health outcomes and workplace experiences for every person, in every role across the profession. The purpose of CST was to provide the profession with the skills to make work a safe place to be and a great place to be, while ensuring the mental health and wellbeing of the profession was always kept front of mind. CST aims to articulate the definitions of psychological health and safety, workplace culture and 'safe teams' for veterinary and animal health businesses, provide evidence-based & strengths-based examples of a safe team, inspire individuals to consider how they can help build a safe veterinary team through personal responsibility & accountability and lastly, encourage practice leaders, managers and entire teams to define and commit to cultivating a workplace that is safe, equitable and well.

CST empowers veterinary professionals

Expectations were exceeded through the delivery of CST to 50 veterinary workplaces across Australia, workplaces described themselves as being 'blown away' with what could be achieved in the 1-hour in clinic workshop. Over 700 veterinary professionals attended a CST session in 2023 and 2024 with participating workplaces describing their staff as feeling empowered, understanding the role they play in creating a mentally healthy workplace and having an increased sense of psychological safety to speak up, respect each other's differences and openly talk about mental health and wellbeing. Participant's knowledge significantly improved in understanding key concepts related to psychological health and safety, but most importantly confidence of participants to identify psychosocial hazards in their workplace increased by 63%, while their confidence to control psychosocial hazards increased by 52%, this was a great step in allowing participants to feel empowered to recognise the things in their work that could be harmful and have some control over fixing them. When it came to psychosocial protective factors participants felt 66% more confident post training to recognise protective factors in their work and 52% more confident to enhance these factors that influence their mental health positively.

Workplace leaders and champions reported that the CST workshop empowered them to implement actions and initiatives to improve the workplace including implementing confidential counselling, developing reward and recognition programs, initiating staff 1:1's with a focus on wellbeing, workload management programs, task rotation to decrease the effects of client abuse and wellbeing working groups. They reported perceived benefits of CST as improved morale, staff supporting and checking in on each other more, people being mindful of their behaviour and respecting what every individual brings to the workplace. Champions described their workplace as happier, with better communication and conflict resolution as well as increased awareness of the differences between staff being a strength to the team.

The future looks bright

The sustainability of the success of CST will be seen through ongoing investment extension of the program beyond the pilot. CST will evolve to a 2-pronged program centered around basic awareness and capability building through ongoing delivery of CST, now called CST aware, this will transition to delivery by trained trainers from the veterinary profession as a peer training model. CST aware will be accompanied by a workplace implementation program called CST action which will guide workplaces in implementing real life change specific to their workplace to address psychosocial risk to make work SAFE and GREAT. The future looks bright in creating a thriving veterinary profession where every person can be their best, in order to achieve their best.





Part 1.

The Journey to Cultivating Safe Teams

In this section the background research that informed Cultivating Safe Teams will be detailed to highlight the evidence base, consultation and stakeholder engagement throughout the development journey.

The journey to Cultivating Safe Teams

Introduction

In this section the following topics will be covered:

- ✓ **History and background of Cultivating Safe Teams**
- ✓ **Research and consultation that informed CST**
- ✓ **THRIVE – a Veterinary Wellness Initiative**
- ✓ **The Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework**

Veterinary wellness research

In 2021 the AVA engaged Superfriend, an organisation specialising in designing and delivering mental health initiatives, to help develop a holistic, comprehensive veterinary wellness strategy to support the veterinary profession. SuperFriend completed a literature review and desktop analysis; providing a summary of the current state of the profession, as well as identifying some of the psychosocial risk, and protective factors, and determining gaps and opportunities in the interventions already used. Both national and international approaches to mental health in the profession were included, to leverage global best practice and inform action on making sustainable and measurable change to mental health in the veterinary profession.

The voice of the profession was critical in addressing mental health and wellness. Superfriend conducted a profession wide survey which heard the voice of people from the profession, as well as gathering further insights and opinions on psychosocial risk and protective factors, and some potential solutions to address these issues through focus group discussions with a diverse group of veterinary profession stakeholders. Focus group stakeholders included representatives from the AVA Workforce Challenges Working Group, mental health thought leaders, individuals with lived experience, industry professionals, practice managers, entity groups, employed veterinarians, nurses, technicians, academics, researchers and veterinary boards. A total of just over 2,500 people were heard through this process with an aim to capture important insights

from every person in every role that make up the profession, not just the role of the veterinarian.

This important research discovered;

- **1 in 6** people report poor or very poor mental health.
- **Women, students and veterinary nurses** were more likely to rate their mental health as poor.
- Those between the **ages of 25-29** had the highest proportion of poor mental health.
- **67%** of people had experienced a mental health condition in their life, with **42%** in the last 12 months.
- **1/4** of people had taken time off for their mental health, **1/3** of people did not disclose the reason to their employer.
- **46%** of people said work had the most negative impact on their mental health.
- **Women** and those between the **ages of 30-35** were impacted most by their work.
- **Over 70%** of people said they leave work daily feeling emotionally drained.
- Common psychosocial **hazards** included high work demands, not being treated fairly, lack of reward, poor leader support.
- **Veterinary specific factors** that drove these hazards included poor client behaviour, work conflict or bullying, long hours, emotionally draining work, and staff shortages.
- Common psychosocial **protective factors** included positive colleague relationships, positive interactions with pet owners, making a difference, serving the community, achieving clinical successes.

This research served as an important vehicle for launching the dedicated veterinary wellness initiative THRIVE, a key recommendation of the research. From this, CST was born. An awareness program which aims to give veterinary workplaces the skills and tools to tackle psychosocial factors in their own workplaces to improve mental health outcomes and workplace experiences. Importantly the research has informed many other initiatives and actions taken by the AVA to tackle mental health across the profession. For the purposes of this report only CST is covered.

THRIVE – A Veterinary Wellness Initiative

In May 2022 following the Superfriend research into veterinary wellness and the recommendations from this research, the AVA launched THRIVE – a veterinary wellness initiative that aims to support veterinarians and veterinary staff to lead satisfying, prosperous and healthy careers.

Further to this and based on the research recommendations, the AVA invested in a fulltime Wellness Officer resource to help develop and manage the various programs that underpin THRIVE as well as forming a Wellness Steering Committee consisting of a range of veterinary profession members including those with lived experience of mental illness.

The development of THRIVE aimed to set the foundation of future AVA programs to prevent harm, promote the positives of the profession, and protect those in a crisis. THRIVE is underpinned by an integrated approach to workplace or workforce mental health which encompasses three main areas of activity:

- **Preventing harm** or protecting mental health by reducing work-related and other risk factors for mental health problems.
- **Promoting mental health** by developing the positive aspects of work as well as worker strengths and positive capacities, and
- **Managing illness** and responding to mental health problems as they manifest at work, regardless of cause. Protecting individuals who are experiencing mental ill-health so they can return to work and thrive.


THRIVE has a range of resources and wellness programs available, including the industry specific Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework, prevent-promote-protect resources, 24hr telephone counselling/EAP service, graduate mentoring program, Mental Health First Aid online training, the annual Veterinary Wellness Symposium, quarterly wellness webinars and the wellness exhibition stand at the AVA National Conference. The Cultivating safe Teams pilot program is part of the broader THRIVE initiative.

Industry round table

In October 2022, veterinary professionals from a range of disciplines, industry experts in the field of mental health, and the AVA veterinary wellness steering group, convened in Sydney to discuss the state of wellness in the veterinary profession. The purpose of the roundtable was to discuss how to effectively work together as one veterinary community; with the outcome of (a) holistically supporting veterinarians and veterinary staff to lead satisfying, prosperous and healthy careers and (b) supporting the clients that veterinarians serve. A key outcome of the round table was the joint consensus from participants that a pilot program focused on psychological safety training across the workplace would be beneficial. There were four common themes that were agreed upon which would inform the guiding principles when developing the CST program and become critical components of the program;

1. A pledge or commitment statement for all veterinary professionals to sign up to, that demonstrates rights to psychological safety in the workplace. A psychological safety charter for the profession.
2. Workplace training including basic 'rights and OHS focused' modules with specific focus on protecting vulnerable workers (such as new graduates).
3. Endorsement for a psychologically safe workplace for all and giving common language to talk about it.
4. Participating workplaces are united – it is a movement rather than a workplace initiative.

These themes would later form the brief for Aspect Group in developing and designing the CST program. More detail on the round table can be found on the AVA website.



“There was such a good focus on practical identification of hazards and what we can do in our workplace. This is the first time I have walked away from a mental health workshop with ideas of what I can do to improve things”

Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework

Next came the development of an industry-specific mental health framework and suicide prevention strategy, which was another key outcome of the Superfriend research, this framework would help guide the purpose, intent and content related to the CST program. Of the several recommendations resulting from the research, the development of a nationally consistent mental health and suicide prevention framework specific to the veterinary profession was viewed as a priority. The framework was informed and led by stakeholders of the veterinary profession and is for all members of the veterinary community.

Based on the integrated approach to workplace mental health (LaMontagne 2014) which represents key areas of action informed by a multi-disciplinary evidence base: protecting worker mental health from harm, promoting the positive aspects of work and worker strengths and capacities and addressing mental health problems as they arise at work, regardless of cause. A successful and sustainable mental health and wellbeing strategy will include actions and initiatives that span the entire integrated approach and intervene at all levels, beginning with prevention first and foremost.

- **Prevent harm** – proactively identifying, assessing and addressing risk factors known to impact mental health and cause harm.
- **Promote the positive** – understanding, increasing and leveraging the protective factors in order to promote the positive aspects of work.
- **Manage illness/protect** – encouraging help seeking behaviours and providing appropriate support for those with a mental illness.



Prevent



Promote



Protect

Stakeholders across the profession came together to articulate what prevent, promote and protect meant for the profession in tangible and practical actions and form the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework. This framework acts as a guide for the profession to consider levels of intervention, balance between proactive and reactive actions and key principles to guide action that will make a tangible difference. A snapshot of the framework can be found in Appendix 1.



Members of Parap Veterinary Hospital



Part 2.

Cultivating Safe Teams Pilot Overview

In this section the Cultivating Safe Teams pilot will be detailed clearly from all steps taken through each stage of design, delivery, implementation and evaluation with key outcomes of the pilot a specific focus.

Cultivating Safe Teams

pilot overview

Introduction

In this section the following topics will be covered:

- ✓ **Pilot purpose, design, key concepts and participant journey**
- ✓ **Overview of participating veterinary workplaces**
- ✓ **How the pilot was delivered**
- ✓ **Post pilot support**

Pilot design & delivery

Why a pilot?

Pilot projects enable organisations to trial new products and services without committing to them too quickly. They're an effective way to assess the viability, effectiveness, and potential impact of a new idea, approach, or solution before considering full-scale implementation. A pilot was chosen for the initial roll out of Cultivating Safe Teams through a limited release of the program to 50 veterinary workplaces across Australia in anticipation of a wider release if successful.

Feedback from users across the Veterinary Profession was important to ensure the program was not only designed for the profession, but by the profession, therefore an opportunity to iterate the program based on real time feedback from the profession proved of critical importance to ensure any future program met the needs of those taking part.

Key features of a pilot that made this approach desirable before rollout to the wider profession include;

Limited scope

It is conducted on a small, manageable scale, such as within a single department, region, group or subset of a wider population.

Test environment

It serves as a test case to identify potential problems, refine processes, and gather feedback.

Evaluation tool

The goal is to assess the practicality, costs, outcomes, and benefits of the project idea.

Risk reduction

It helps to minimise the risk of failure in a broader rollout by uncovering issues early.

Inform decision-making

The results from the pilot guide decisions about whether to scale up, modify, or abandon the initiative.

Program purpose

The purpose of the Cultivating Safe Teams program was clear, overall providing the profession with the skills to make work a safe place to be and great place to be was a priority, while ensuring the mental health and wellbeing of the profession was always kept front of mind, this would be achieved through four key aims;

1. Articulate the definitions of **psychological health and safety, workplace culture and 'safe teams'** for veterinary and animal health businesses.
2. Provide **evidence-based & strengths-based** examples of a safe team.
3. Inspire individuals to consider how they can help build a safe veterinary team **through personal responsibility & accountability.**
4. Encourage practice leaders, managers and entire teams to define and **commit** to cultivating a workplace that is safe, equitable and well.



Members of Roseworthy Veterinary Hospital

The Pledge

The pledge acknowledges the commitment of both individuals and teams to demonstrating a mentally healthy workplace. The aim is to unite participating workplaces involved in the CST pilot that they are all involved in setting this standard for the profession. The ultimate goal being extension of the pilot program to an industry wide movement in which the pledge acts as a commitment to drive action and encourage accountability.

The pledge attempts to meet a key aim of the program by inspiring individuals to consider how they can help build a safe veterinary team through personal responsibility & accountability. Following the completion of an in-workplace CST workshop participants were encouraged to sign the pledge to commit to action in the future. This commitment leverages principles from behavioural science that suggest when we commit to something by either saying it out loud or signing our name to it, we are more likely to take action, this taps into our human nature and social tendencies as powerful motivators.

Taking the pledge allows participating workplaces to display a poster in their workplace as a visual reminder of their commitment to making work a safe and great place to be by keeping the learnings from the workshop front of mind on the good and bad days.



Steve from Nanango Vets

CST participants were asked to commit to three key actions when taking the pledge;

1. We pledge our commitment to cultivating a safe and mentally healthy workplace. The psychological health and safety of myself and others is our priority.
2. We commit to working together, and to cultivate ways of working that will prevent psychological harm in our veterinary workplaces. A safe environment is everyone's responsibility.
3. We commit to eliminating, minimizing, and or preventing psychosocial hazards. A psychosocial hazard is anything that can cause psychological harm.

Steering group brainstorm

In July 2023 following development of the program purpose the Veterinary Wellness Steering Group came together for a group brainstorming session with Aspect Group who were engaged as the facilitation partners for the CST program. The group brainstorming session aimed to achieve 3 main objectives;

Objective 1: Define success

Determine what success of the CST program would look like and how this would be measured and evaluated to determine impact and achievements of objectives.

Objective 2: Test and ideate key concepts and content

Determine key concepts critical for inclusion in the learning material to drive the desired outcomes and objectives.

Objective 3: Determine any veterinary profession tailoring requirements

Use the collective voice and experience of those in the steering group to tailor and test veterinary specific examples to bring content to life to ensure the training was relevant and useful for veterinary professionals.

Key concepts covered in CST workshop

The content was designed with an evidence-based approach in mind and although the content was tailored to veterinary workplaces the key concepts originate from best practice frameworks, research and concepts in the area of psychological health and safety, psychological safety and workplace mental health. The content centres around differentiating between two key concepts that are often used interchangeably, however are distinctly different, this is *psychological health and safety* and *psychological safety*. The workshop is therefore simplified into a practical approach to tackling these two concepts through making work a *SAFE place to be*, as well as a *GREAT place to be*. A brief overview of key concepts and topics covered in the workshop is provided in the below table.

Table 1 – content and concepts covered in CST workshop

PART 1 Mentally healthy workplaces	
Concept	Description
Why mentally healthy workplaces?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The relationship between work and wellbeing from a positive and negative perspective. The benefits of mentally healthy workplaces including legal, organisation, team, community and individual benefits.
What is a mentally healthy workplace?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defining a mentally healthy workplace from proactively promoting mental health and wellbeing through to supporting those who may be unwell. The individual and leaders' role in creating a mentally healthy workplace. Preventative approaches to reduce harm.
PART 2 Making work a SAFE place to be	
Psychological health and safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The risk management framework used in Australia to prevent psychological injuries in the workplace governed by WHS Act 2011. Key employee and employer legal obligations as they apply to mental health at work.
Psychosocial hazards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defining psychosocial hazards as any factor in the design or management of work that increases the risk of work-related stress and can lead to psychological or physical harm. Understanding how hazards can result in psychological harm. An overview of the 17 psychosocial factors that can be present in any workplace as well as veterinary specific factors that may drive the presence of hazards in veterinary workplaces. How hazards can result in burnout. An interactive opportunity for participants to identify the top 5 hazards present in their workplace. How to identify, assess and control psychosocial hazards using the hierarchy of control.
PART 3 Making work a GREAT place to be	
Performance based wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difference between good stress and bad stress. The pressure performance curve. Understanding how people respond differently to stress through an interactive activity.
Psychosocial protective factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defining psychosocial protective factors as anything at work that protects us from stress, bolsters mental health or increases engagement. How to balance hazards and protective factors through the job demands-resources model (JD-R model). Examples of psychosocial protective factors.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An interactive opportunity for participants to identify the top psychosocial protective factors in their workplace.
Psychological safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defining psychological safety as a group level phenomenon where there exists a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking. The psychological safety ladder.
Meaning and purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meaning and purpose as a motivational driver in veterinary work. Understanding your individual and team 'why'.
Interpersonal theory of suicide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The importance of belonging and usefulness as protective factors against suicide risk and poor mental health. The science behind suicide risk. How we can protect ourselves and work colleagues through psychological safety and meaning and purpose.
PART 4 Taking the pledge	
The pledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defining the pledge as a commitment device. Encourage participants to commit to action following the workshop.
Practical every-day actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take away actions to prevent harm. Take away actions to promote the positive. Take away actions to protect wellbeing.


Image 1 – Psychological health and safety vs psychological safety



Participant journey

The key to designing the participant journey through the CST program was simplicity. The time commitment and level of engagement needed to be as simple and practical as possible. Careful consideration was given to designing the participant journey to ensure ultimate respect was given to the fact that those working in the veterinary profession are considerably time poor and the CST program should not apply pressure or be another thing piling up on the plate.

The total time investment for each individual taking part in CST was 2 hours maximum, inclusive of a 1 hour face-to-face in workplace workshop as well as a combination of mandatory and optional pre and post workshop actions and activities. Before the training participants could login to the dedicated learning management system setup by AVA specifically for CST to access a 2-minute pre-introduction video, complete a pre-evaluation survey to get a gauge of baseline knowledge, skills and confidence and access optional additional resources that they could view if they were interested.



"The training provided was beautifully presented and Carly was warm, engaging and professional. She provided wonderful ethical and legal reasons to prioritise making work a safe and great place to be".

Participants then attended the 1-hour workshop inclusive of question-and-answer time post workshop and were provided with an opportunity for individual debriefs as needed if they found any of the material confronting or triggering. Post workshop participants were invited to complete a short post-evaluation for comparison and encouraged to take the pledge to commit to action following their return to the workplace. They then had access to a range of on-demand resources, additional learning and tools through the learning management system which is detailed further below.

Resources and materials

Following the theme of simplicity, easy and adaptable delivery means the resources and materials used for the CST program are minimal. A participant workbook is provided for all participants to follow along during the workshop and make notes.

The workshop was designed with accessibility in mind, noting that all individuals learn differently therefore participants could choose to engage in the workshop and absorb the information by listening to the facilitator, visually through the PowerPoint slides or by following along with the workbook. Given the variety of environments in which the workshops took place it was important the workshop could be delivered formally through the slide deck and workbook or verbally as a conversation with the workbook as a guide. Not all veterinary workplaces have access to technology or physical space, therefore flexibility in the mode of delivery was an important consideration. Sessions were conducted in waiting rooms, consult rooms, x-ray spaces, veterinary staff lounge rooms, horse crushes and next to dogs getting their teeth cleaned, the veterinary environment was embraced for all it has to offer.

AVA provided access to a Learning Management System (LMS) to not only house all the training materials and evaluation tools, but to give participants access to further learning tools post the workshop. Participants were able to choose their own journey post the 1 hour in workplace workshop and access a series of webinars to explore a range of topics in more depth and sustain the learnings from the workshop. Webinars were designed to be between 15-30 minutes and could be viewed on demand for both leaders and staff dependent on what resonated the most with each individual and workplace. Topics covered in the webinar series included;

1. **Psychological health & safety** – learn how to identify, assess and control psychosocial hazards.
2. **Psychological safety** – learn how to assess and enhance psychological safety in the team.
3. **Help giving & support** – learn how to create a culture of mental health help giving.
4. **Burnout & stress management** – learn how to beat stress, burnout & compassion fatigue.
5. **Human centred leadership** – learn how to enhance your leadership skills through human centred leadership approaches.

An overview of the post training resources is listed in Appendix 2.

Pilot participating workplaces

An expression of interest (EOI) was undertaken to source pilot workplaces for the CST program. The EOI process was open and accessible to any veterinary workplace across Australia and was advertised through all Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) marketing channels including social media networks. AVA received 126 EOIs from veterinary workplaces of all shapes and sizes across Australia, with a final 50 to be selected for the program.

Interested veterinary workplaces were asked to submit an EOI form which consisted of a range of logistic based questions required for meeting the pilot criteria as well as answering the question *'In 100 words or less, please describe why your workplace should be chosen for the pilot program and how you might lead the championing of a cultivating safe team's pledge across the whole profession'*. Workplaces submitted a range of responses from being passionate about mental health and wanting to be better, right the way through to being in a cultural crisis and desperately needing help to make the workplace better. Some examples of responses include;

"Whilst veterinary professionals are in the high-risk population for mental health challenges, I believe those working shift work are in an additional risk group. We are a clinically leading and well-respected facility in our community thus we would also like to lead by example when it comes to mental health of our highly qualified and diligent staff"

"We are a complicated workplace which is a mixed practice with referral equine cases, and we also teach final year students for equine medicine, surgery and ambulatory work. Being able to work in a stressful transparent environment with sensitivity towards your colleagues and students is a must"

"It is getting harder and harder to find industry specific programs that truly understand what our profession needs. The prevent, promote, protect pillars have inspired me to find out more. This is exactly what we are trying to achieve and being part of an AVA initiative would surely assist us in our mission to keep our teams safe".

"We are a close-knit team with members that do struggle with mental health and are open about it. Being in a regional area and doing on call and emergency work I believe we do face a lot of pressures on our mental health. We are also poorer equipped due to the lack of resources available in regional areas. We would be honoured to be part of the pilot program and look forward to spreading the word and our experience".

"The loss of a former team member to suicide 2 years ago rocked our team amidst the COVID pressure, contributing to the collapse of the team and high turnover of staff. I want my team to develop skills and resilience and be more autonomous in self-care while doing what we need to do to make the workplace the best it can be and protect our staff"

There were a range of criteria applied to select the 50 workplaces that would form the pilot group, including;

- ✓ Minimum 3 employees able to take part in CST workshop
- ✓ Mix of independent and corporate workplaces
- ✓ Even geographical spread based on veterinary population in each state and territory
- ✓ Mix of rural, remote, regional, metro and major cities
- ✓ Representation across private practice, equine, large animal, small animal, mixed, production, exotics or wildlife, emergency/referral, university, government, industry
- ✓ AVA Member and non-member status considered
- ✓ Vulnerable, engaged, mature and developing workplaces all considered

The final 50 clinics chosen to partake in the pilot met the above criteria and were able to include between 3-30 people in the 1 hour face-to-face in workplace CST workshop.

Table 2 – Participating Veterinary Workplaces

State or territory	Workplace(s)
NSW	West Blacktown Veterinary Clinic Animal Referral & Emergency Centre Newcastle Deniliquin Veterinary Clinic Fletcher Veterinary Practice Goulburn Vet Clinic Equine Vet & Dental Services Southern Highlands Veterinary Centre Macarthur Veterinary Group REC Specialist Equine Centre Pet Behaviour Vet Summer Hill Village Vet Tenterfield Veterinary Clinic Agnes Banks Equine Clinic Holistic Vets Newcastle Scone Equine Hospital Valley Vet Surgery
VIC	Ballarat Veterinary Practice The Corner Vet Horsham Veterinary Hospital VetPartners Hawthorn Group Wandin Veterinary Clinic Indigo Veterinary Services Monash Vet Cherished Pets Evervet Prahran Trafalgar Veterinary Centre Newtown Veterinary Clinic Dandenong Ranges Veterinary Centre
QLD	WestVETS Animal Hospital Tropical Vets Emergency Vets 24/7 Rangeside Vets Marlin Coast Veterinary Hospital Valley Veterinary Surgery Fraser Coast Veterinary Services Nanango Vets Suncoast Vets Judhar Pty Ltd Townsville Vet Clinic
WA	Swans Veterinary Services Swan Vet Hospital Perth Cat Hospital West Coast Veterinary Hospital Swanbourne Vets Grantham Street Veterinary Clinic
SA	Murray Bridge Vet Clinic Riverland Veterinary Practice Roseworthy Veterinary Hospital
ACT	Northside Veterinary Centre
TAS	Animal Medical Centre Launceston
NT	Parap Veterinary Hospital

Post workshop support

Although the pilot was designed as an early awareness mechanism to build knowledge that encourages action across the profession, the need for practical advice, support and solutions was organically always going to present. Aspect Group had this in mind throughout the design, therefore built two levels of post workshop support into the program. Firstly, there was debriefing time made available post workshop for anyone who found the content triggering or confronting. The Aspect Group Facilitator was available for immediate support and debriefing as well as being a link to formal counselling through the AVA 24/7 counselling service. Many individuals took this opportunity, however this was not tracked or measured formally as part of the pilot. The second type of support available was for advice or guidance for workplace champions or leaders from the Aspect Group facilitator to implement any changes or take action to cultivate a safe team. Every workplace was offered 1:1 support in the days, weeks or months following delivery of the workshop. Workplaces used this option to write policies and procedures, complete work health and safety (WHS) audits, conduct staff surveys and implement actions based on psychosocial hazards identified in the CST workshop. This too was not measured formally, as it was considered additional to the base pilot program offering.



Members of the Judhar Veterinary Team



Part 3.

Cultivating Safe Teams Pilot Outcomes

In this section the Cultivating Safe Teams pilot outcomes will be reported on. Qualitative and quantitative data will highlight knowledge, confidence and intent to act results, workplace initiatives and impacts will also be included to give an overall picture of the successes and opportunities of the pilot.

CST pilot outcomes

Introduction

In this section the following topics will be covered:

- ✓ **Evaluation method and metrics**
- ✓ **Evaluation results – quantitative data**
- ✓ **Evaluation results – qualitative data**
- ✓ **Summary of reported workplace outcomes**

Evaluation design

Measuring the effectiveness of any pilot program is of critical importance when it comes to future scalability and wider rollout. For the purposes of the CST program the Kirkpatrick Training Evaluation Model was used as the evidence-based framework for analysing the effectiveness and impact of the program. Developed by Donald Kirkpatrick in the 1950s, this framework evaluates training across four levels, each building on the previous one.

Level 1: Reaction

The goal of the reaction stage is to get a good grasp of how satisfied participants are with the training. In the process, recurring themes or patterns and potential areas for improvement may be observed. This may be through participation rates, completion rates or satisfaction scores. Qualitative data through surveys or interviews may be used to gauge effectiveness with open ended questions. Quantitative data using a scale to measure how valuable or relevant training is or how likely participants are to recommend the training can also be used.

Level 2: Learning

This learning stage's goal is to ensure the training has met its intended objectives, identify the skills that the training can develop within participants, and note any knowledge and/or skills that have been learned as a result. This may be through acquired knowledge and/or skills or transfer of training into daily performance. It is useful to do this before and after training to bring clarity to what the training has specifically contributed to the participant. Qualitative data through pre- and post-interviews with participants can be used to gauge level of

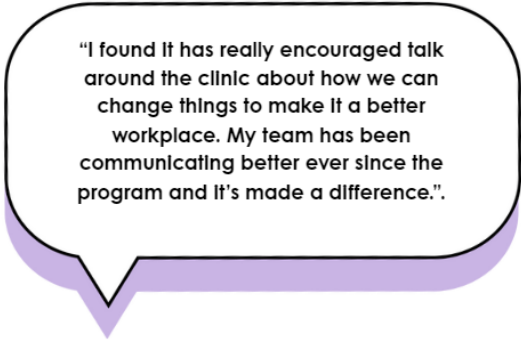
confidence to apply skills or learnings as well as understanding perceived improvements in performance. Quantitative data through surveys, tests and examinations after the training or assessments may be considered.

Level 3: Behaviour

The behavior stage's goal is to see whether the participants behavior has changed due to the training received and to what degree. In particular, how the training influenced their performance and general attitude, as well as the impact of the training or intent to apply the learnings. Behavior change is most commonly measured through observations and reviews pre- and post-training as well as interviews and reflections. Qualitative data could include open-ended questions like how participants put what they learned in training to use in their job, how confident they would be teaching their acquired knowledge and skills to someone else, or if they feel like their behavior is different than it was before the training. Quantitative data may include third party observation.

Level 4: Results

The final stage's goal is to evaluate how effective the training program has been in driving results in the environment. In this stage, it's common to measure results like productivity, efficiency, and customer satisfaction or any other metric used to measure performance. Qualitative data may be collected by way of interviews or focus groups. For example, managers may be interviewed to determine whether they feel their employees are noticeably more productive or producing higher quality work since the training. Quantitative data may be collected via surveys to measure the perceptions of customers and stakeholders, comparing data on employee turnover and retention rate, and analysing outcomes and performance metrics before and after the training.



"I found it has really encouraged talk around the clinic about how we can change things to make it a better workplace. My team has been communicating better ever since the program and it's made a difference."

For the purpose of the CST program a mixed method evaluation approach was taken to combine all four levels of the *Kirkpatrick Model* to determine satisfaction, relevance, behaviour change through knowledge gain, confidence, intent to act and skill application as well as perceived outcomes and results of training and associated impact on the broader workplace. Program evaluation was primarily conducted through the collection of data and responses through pre and post training surveys for all participants as well as interviews with workplace champions 3-6 months post the delivery of the 1-hour CST in workplace workshop, these were conducted by members of the Veterinary Wellness Steering Group.

An overview of the evaluation method is captured below;

- **Level 1: Reaction** - Post training survey
Post training satisfaction via relevance and usefulness scores (quantitative) and qualitative verbatim feedback.
- **Level 2: Learning** - Pre & Post training survey
Comparison of skill & knowledge level of key concepts before and after training as well as confidence level to apply learnings.
- **Level 3: Behaviour** - Post training survey
Post training intent to apply skills and knowledge in the workplace setting.
- **Level 4: Results** - Post training interviews
Interviews with pilot workplace champions to determine perceived impact of training on individuals and workplaces.

Pre & Post training evaluation survey

Participants were required to complete a pre and post training survey to evaluate knowledge, skills, confidence and intent to act upon learnings, as well as overall satisfaction with the program. Strengths and opportunities of the program were also evaluated to inform any changes prior to wider rollout.

Questions asked through the pre, and post training survey are detailed in the below table.

Table 3 – pre & post training evaluation questions

Pre & post training survey questions	
Metric	Questions
Knowledge gain	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I understand what a mentally healthy workplace is... 2. I understand the benefits of a mentally healthy workplace... 3. I understand the concept of psychological health & safety... 4. I understand my legal obligations related to psych H&S... 5. I understand what psychosocial hazards are... 6. I understand what psychosocial protective factors are... 7. I understand the concept of psychological safety...
Confidence/skill gain	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I am confident I can IDENTIFY psychosocial hazards... 2. I am confident I can CONTROL psychosocial hazards... 3. I am confident I can RECOGNISE protective factors... 4. I am confident I can ENHANCE protective factors... 5. I can contribute to making work a SAFE place to be... 6. I can contribute to making work a GREAT place to be...
Post-training survey questions	
Intent to apply knowledge/skills	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I intend to apply what I've learned to make work SAFE 2. I intend to apply what I've learned to make work GREAT 3. I intend to take the pledge to cultivate a safe team
Satisfaction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I found the training useful to my role in the veterinary profession 2. I found the training relevant to my role in the veterinary profession

Post training workplace champion interviews

Between 3-6 months post delivery of the CST workshop in each workplace key contacts and workplace champions from each clinic were interviewed by members of the Veterinary Wellness Steering Group and asked a range of questions to determine the impact of the CST training on either individuals or the workplace as a whole. These findings could be based on evidence, data or perception to validate said impacts.

Questions asked through the interview process are listed below;

1. What impact has the pilot program had on your workplace
2. Have you noticed if there has been an increase in productivity of the team since completion of the pilot program?
3. Since participating in the training have you observed any of the following:
 - a. Team is working more or less cohesively.
 - b. The workplace appears to be happier or less happy.
 - c. Any other observations (increased confidence, increased empowerment)
4. Did you experience any negative feedback from your team regarding:
 - a. Why the training was being delivered
 - b. Taking the time out of their workday to participate in the training
 - c. Accessing the learning management system and resources
5. What can we do better to support you as a champion of the program?
 - a. What was the experience like for you leading this with your team?
6. What would be the one take home from the program you would like to share with others?
7. Following the training session what do you believe you needed to implement changes in your team to cultivate a safe team in day-to-day practice?
8. What are your ideas for implementing the CST program in as many Australian practices as possible?

Evaluation results

Completion rates/ participation

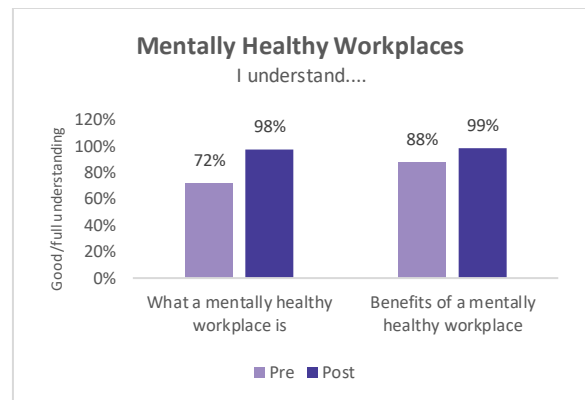
- 50 workplaces visited from all states and territories across Australia
- 666 people attended a face-to-face CST session
- 48 people attended an online CST session

Knowledge gain

Mentally healthy workplaces

The base level understanding of why mentally healthy workplaces are important and what constitutes a mentally healthy workplace was quite high amongst participants, knowledge on this topic improved by an average of 18.5% when assessing good and full understanding.

Graph 1 – Knowledge gain related to mentally healthy workplaces

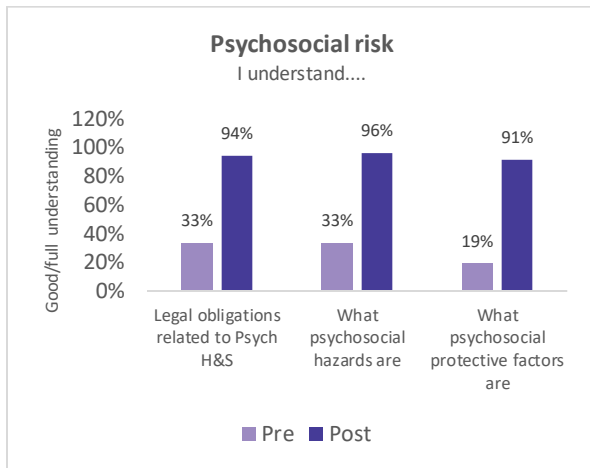


Psychological health & safety, psychological safety & psychosocial risk

Psychological safety and psychological health and safety are terms often used interchangeably, however as noted above they are distinctly different concepts. It was important for participants to understand the difference between them as it applies to cultivating a safe team and making work a SAFE and GREAT place to be, this is critical when understanding psychosocial risk. Understanding of psychological health and safety improved from 54% to 97%, while understanding of psychological safety improved from 30% to 95% when it came to assessing good or full understanding.

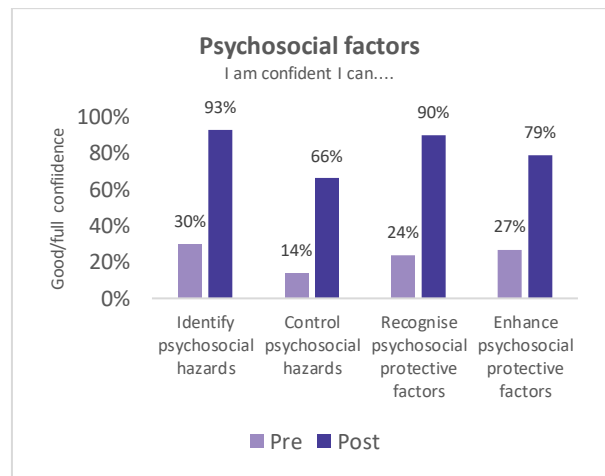
Understanding the legal obligations associated with identifying, assessing and controlling psychosocial risk was a key outcome of the training. Learning about psychosocial hazards and protective factors was important to empower participants to understand the factors in their day-to-day work that have the potential to positively and negatively impact on mental health. There were significant increases in knowledge in this area across all three concepts, understanding of legal obligations related to psychological health and safety improved by 61%, understanding of psychosocial hazards increased by 63% and understanding of psychosocial protective factors increased most significantly by 72%.

Graph 2 – Knowledge gain related to psychosocial risk



"I was initially skeptical about what could be achieved in a one-hour session but was blown away with how practical and useful the face-to-face session was"

Graph 3 – Knowledge gain related to psychosocial factors



Confidence and intent to act

Understanding is important, however confidence in applying knowledge and intent to act with that knowledge is critical to change taking place in the workplace.

Psychosocial factors

When it comes to managing psychosocial factors in the workplace participant's confidence to take action to identify and control hazards was evaluated as well as confidence to take action to recognise and enhance psychosocial protective factors. Although the workplace and leaders have obligations and influence in this space, it was important to empower participants to take action within their control to contribute to the safety of the workplace to reinforce that everyone has a role to play.

Confidence of participants to identify psychosocial hazards in their workplace increased by 63%, while their confidence to control psychosocial hazards increased by 52%, this was a great step in allowing participants to feel empowered to recognise the things in their work that could be harmful and have some control over fixing them. When it came to psychosocial protective factors participants felt 66% more confident post training to recognise protective factors in their work and 52% more confident to enhance these factors that influence their mental health positively.

Personal contribution to the workplace

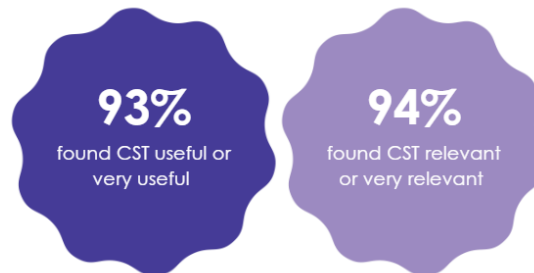
Keeping with the theme of personal accountability to cultivating a safe team it was important to understand, based on everything participants learnt in the workshop, whether they felt confident they could contribute to making work SAFE and GREAT, therefore meeting both their legal obligations and moral/ethical obligations. Participants felt 22% more confident they could contribute to making work a SAFE place to be (72% vs 94%), and 18% more confident they could contribute to making work a GREAT place to be (74% vs 92%).

Intent to apply learnings

Leveraging this increased confidence in applying what was learnt in the workshop, the next step is cultivating positive intention. Participants were asked if they intended to use what they learnt to make work a SAFE and GREAT place to be, as well as if they intended to take the pledge. On average, 99% of participants had positive intention to apply what they had learnt.

Satisfaction

Satisfaction with the workshop was assessed based on relevance and usefulness ratings. Through the design of the program a key consideration was the fact that the profession is generally time poor, the program therefore needed to be seen as relevant to roles within the profession and useful on a day-to-day basis to ensure it is worth the time investment of participants. Pleasingly, 93% of participants felt the workshop was useful or very useful, and 94% of participants felt it was relevant or very relevant to their role in the veterinary profession demonstrating a high level of satisfaction with the program. Many participants said CST 'exceeded their expectations'.



Strengths of the program

Participants were asked to provide qualitative feedback about things they liked and didn't like as well as strengths and weaknesses of the program. In terms of key strengths, there were some common themes represented. Participants rated the way the session was facilitated as the top strength, noting it was warm, engaging and professional, while others said it was interesting and practical while the *'Interactive component was insightful and meaningful for the group.'* Many participants felt the workshop exceeded their expectations, some felt sceptical going in, especially having to give up an hour of their time during a busy day, however, were glad they attended, some saying it was the *'best mental health session they had ever been to'*.

The fact that it was interactive and practical were key strengths, one person saying they were 'blown away with what could actually be achieved within the 1 hour', the practical identification of hazards from each workplace meant people felt they could walk away with really clear actions going back to the workplace. The final strength rounding out the top 5 was the fact the session was tailored to the veterinary profession.

Other notable strengths included the pace of the session and the amount of information that could be covered in the allocated time, that it made an impact and created a safe space for people to open up and increased people's awareness of their own communication and behaviour at work. The fact that the session talked about and acknowledged suicide head on, and didn't dance around the topic was seen as positive.

Top 5 strengths of CST

- 1 The way the session was facilitated
- 2 It was informative, engaging & exceeded expectations
- 3 It provided and promoted practical actions
- 4 The fact the session was interactive
- 5 How it was tailored to the veterinary profession

Top 5 opportunities of CST

- 1 Need for further learning & follow up
- 2 It could have been longer & deserved more time
- 3 Faith in action being taken following the training
- 4 Usability of the learning management system (LMS)
- 5 Talking about suicide directly can be confronting

Opportunities for the program

Where there are strengths, there are opportunities. Participants provided a range of ideas and suggestions on how CST could be improved as well as feedback on any components they perhaps were not as satisfied with. The need for further learning and follow up was identified as the number one opportunity. Some individuals and workplaces felt they didn't have enough time to take action following the workshop to either learn more or put actions in place to improve things at work. As there was a large proportion of people who described the workshop as 'exceeding expectations', many felt it could have been longer and deserved more time. Despite CST being sold as an early awareness raising initiative and the profession reporting they could not afford the time investment; at times this message was lost and people wanted more. There was a healthy level of scepticism that nothing would change, or no action would be taken after the workshop, this was particularly common in workplaces where the leader was not involved in CST or was perhaps the main barrier to making work SAFE and GREAT.

The Learning Management System (LMS) was reported as a barrier, mainly because of its usability. The LMS was developed and maintained by AVA in order to book sessions, manage attendance and house pre and post resources and tools to be triggered at the appropriate time. A key barrier here could be the lack of email usage in the profession, many veterinary roles in particular were not regular users of email as communication at work, therefore managing notifications and monitoring communication was difficult at times which no doubt contributed to the perceived lack of usability.

In direct contrast to this in the top strengths, talking directly about suicide was upsetting and triggering for some individuals, despite the use of disclaimers and trigger warnings this component of the workshop was not received well by some participants. Assumptions can be made that those with lived or living experience may receive this information from a vulnerable space which may make it upsetting, this can be validated through post session debriefs. Aspect Group made themselves available after each workshop for support and debriefing as well as workplace strategy advice, often it was those with lived or living experience that needed support post the workshop the most.

Some other feedback surrounded the scheduling of sessions, despite workplaces being asked for the best days and times that suited their workforce, some participants felt inconvenienced by the scheduled session that it was at a busy time or that there were interruptions that needed attending to. Some participants with more advanced maturity on the subject matter felt the session was too basic, despite the purpose being a first step awareness raising and knowledge building workshop. Lastly, having an increased knowledge on psychosocial factors in the workplace also gave some people an increased awareness of the issues that exist in their own workplace, opening their eyes per se. Some also felt they had an increased awareness that their workplace was not safe or that they did not feel safe to speak up in the session.

Information gathered through the qualitative feedback aims to review and refine the material for wider rollout post the pilot.

Pledge

As described above, the pledge acknowledges the commitment of both individuals and teams to demonstrating a mentally healthy workplace. The aim is to unite participating workplaces involved in the CST pilot that they are all involved in setting the standard for the profession. The ultimate goal being extension of the pilot program to an industry wide movement in which the pledge acts as a commitment to drive action and encourage accountability. Following the in-workplace workshop participants were encouraged to sign the pledge and commit to cultivating a safe team every day. Of the 666 people who attended a CST session, just under 50% of participants took the pledge (330 people), despite 99% of participants saying they intended to take the pledge immediately post training. There are a range of possible reasons why the intention of taking the pledge didn't quite translate to action, perhaps the concept didn't quite resonate with participants, perhaps the administrative burden of having to login to the LMS was a challenge, or perhaps participants did not feel they needed to sign their name to something to take action in real life. Additional information was not collected around why the pledge didn't resonate; however, this remains a question for the future of CST as to whether the pledge is a critical component to the success of the program or makes an impact or difference to the outcome. This could be tested further if there was desire to do so.

Reported workplace outcomes

The impact of CST on the workplace was measured in 2 ways, tangible action taken by the workplace as a result of what was learnt in the CST workshop, as well as perceived outcomes reported by participating workplaces. Direct correlation between the CST program and reported outcomes cannot be determined given the many variables that could drive these outcomes. The pilot, however, was an ongoing journey of continuous improvement, the most important measure being the actions taken by workplaces to make work SAFE and GREAT through building knowledge, capability and empowering individuals and workplaces alike.

Actions taken

Following the CST workshop workplaces were encouraged to take steps to leverage their newfound knowledge and awareness towards practical and tangible actions to cultivate a safe team. Below are some examples of actions participating workplaces took as a direct result of attending a CST session.

Wellness Working Group Created a team driven working group to focus on wellbeing initiatives in the workplace.	Psychosocial Hazard Survey Implemented a psychosocial hazard survey to dive deeper into the hazards present in the workplace.	Staff 1:1 Catch Ups Commenced individual staff 1:1 catch ups with an added emphasis on wellbeing.
Task Rotation Implemented a task rotation process to reduce exposure to customer and client abuse.	Team Charter Developed a team charter that considers every staff member's needs in creating a positive culture.	Wellbeing Meetings Created regular space for wellbeing as an agenda item in team meetings to create open conversation.
Employee Assistance Program Implemented an Employee Assistance Program for free counselling for all staff members.	Rewards & Appreciation Created a team WhatsApp group for team appreciation, thanks and positive compliments.	Team Building Created opportunity and space for team bonding and building activities to build relationships.
Workload Planning Staff initiated workload plan where people can share openly what's on their plate and when support is needed.	Change Management Plan Implementing a change management process and plan so people are consulted and informed during change.	Role Clarity Plan Putting in place clear position descriptions and clearly articulating the purpose of each role.

Perceived outcomes

Direct correlation between training delivery and outcome is challenging to determine, however leaders and champions were asked to reflect on any observations or data points they have seen changes in following the CST workshop. This was captured in terms of perceived outcome of the CST program and highlighted below.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Morale & productivity increases ✓ Improved ability to cope with stress ✓ More open about mental health ✓ People checking in on colleagues ✓ Staff feeling more empowered ✓ More awareness of differences ✓ Respect for other's ways of working ✓ Safe to speak up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Happier & cohesive team ✓ Better conflict resolution ✓ Improved feedback ✓ More mindful of behaviour ✓ People understand their role ✓ Better communication ✓ Playing to staff strengths ✓ More care for each other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Decreased turnover ✓ Decreased absenteeism ✓ Increased psychological safety ✓ Leader has more empathy ✓ Greater safety accountability ✓ Greater respect ✓ More confident team
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Summary

Overall, the CST program met the desired objectives to improve knowledge and confidence in what it takes to create a SAFE and GREAT workplace while also encouraging practical action and accountability for individuals and teams to take ownership and drive change in their own workplace. This knowledge and confidence gain allows veterinary professionals to consider the things that impact their mental health at work, both the good and bad and do something about it, importantly while being supported by a workplace that is meeting their legal and moral obligations to keep everyone safe and well.



Part 4.

Cultivating Safe Teams Train-the-Trainer

In this section an overview of the Cultivating Safe Teams Train-the-Trainer component of the pilot will be provided including the purpose, design and development as well as the evaluation and outcomes.

CST Train the trainer

Introduction

In this section the following topics will be covered:

- ✓ **Purpose and intent of train the trainer initiative**
- ✓ **Train the trainer design and delivery overview**
- ✓ **Evaluation results**

Purpose & intent

To ensure the program's long-term sustainability, a peer training model has been implemented through the train-the-trainer program. In this model, up to 15 veterinary professionals were sought for selection and training to serve as facilitators for the CST program in the future. These individuals were equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to deliver CST training to their peers, creating a ripple effect of awareness and fostering a culture of safety and wellbeing across the profession.

Interested individuals from within the veterinary profession were invited to express interest in becoming a CST trainer through the Australian Veterinary Association's marketing channels. Individuals who expressed interest, answering key selection criteria were selected once screened by a diverse selection panel including members of the AVA Veterinary Wellness Steering Group and Aspect Group. Short interviews were scheduled to assess communication skills, interpersonal abilities, and alignment with the program's goals. However, this was not necessary as all who applied met the criteria and were recommended to proceed to the 2-day program, due to application numbers not exceeding capacity.

Key selection criteria included the below;

Table 4 – selection criteria for train-the-trainer participants

Industry experience	Veterinary professionals with a minimum 5 years' experience in the veterinary profession. Familiarity with common workplace challenges, dynamics, and stressors in veterinary settings.
Communication skills	Proven ability to communicate complex information clearly and effectively and an ability to engage effectively and respectfully with people regardless of their status or authority. Experience in facilitating group discussions and engaging diverse audiences.
Commitment to Psychological Health and Safety	Demonstrated interest or involvement in mental health advocacy, workplace culture improvement, or psychological safety initiatives with an understanding of basic mental health principles or willingness to undertake preliminary training in this area.
Interpersonal Skills	Strong empathy and active listening skills with an ability to foster trust and a non-judgmental environment.
Training Experience	Previous experience in delivering training, workshops, or presentations with an ability to adapt teaching methods to suit different learning styles and environments.
Professionalism and Ethics	Commitment to confidentiality and ethical conduct during training and delivery with a strong reputation for integrity within the veterinary community.
Flexibility and Adaptability	Willingness to undergo intensive training and adapt to new content and delivery methods with an openness to feedback and continuous improvement. Ability to adapt and change plans on the fly dependent on clinic circumstances while using various presentation methods dependent on clinic resources.
Technological capability	Ability to use or learn to use Microsoft PowerPoint, AVA learning management system & Mentimeter.
Availability	Ability to commit to the required 2-day training session, online refresher courses and co-facilitation sessions. Willingness to travel if the program involves different workplace locations.

AVA intended to deliver CST Awareness training sessions in 2025 and 2026 facilitated by experienced trainers from Aspect Group. The goal is to provide this training to the broader veterinary community, future training will be delivered by veterinary professionals (trained trainers) for veterinary professionals to achieve the vision of a movement that reaches every veterinary professional across Australia.

Unfortunately Aspect Group closed in May 2025, highlighting the need for a trainer program.

Design & delivery

The THRIVE Cultivating Safe Teams (CST) facilitator training included a comprehensive development program designed to empower veterinary professionals with the tools and confidence to lead CST sessions effectively in the future. The program will run through to April 2026, therefore is still ongoing.

Key components of the training include:

- **Initial 2-Day Workshop:**
Participants attended an in-depth workshop conducted by Aspect Group, designed to equip them with foundational facilitation skills and knowledge about the CST program.
- **Follow-Up Observation/Co-Facilitation:**
Trainers have the opportunity to co-facilitate a CST session (online or face-to-face) alongside an experienced Aspect Group facilitator, allowing for real-time learning and mentorship.
- **Refresher Sessions:**
To support ongoing development and reinforce learning, trainers will participate in online refresher sessions at 6 months and 12 months post-training. This structure ensures a well-rounded training experience, fostering confidence and competence in delivering CST sessions.



Members of the Agnes Banks Equine Clinic Team

The 2-day workshop is designed to allow trainers to build knowledge and grow their confidence in translating key concepts in an adult learning environment. The program was structured as follows:

Day 1

- **The CST journey so far:** deep dive into key research that informed CST
- **CST pilot overview:** a thorough overview of the CST pilot from start to finish
- **CST in real time:** seeing CST delivered through the participants eyes
- **Key concepts deep dive:** overview of the evidence informing key CST concepts

Day 2

- **Adult learning principles:** how to create an effective adult learning experience
- **Facilitation tools & skills:** core skills required to facilitate engaging and effective training
- **Facilitation in real time:** practical component where participants facilitated a core piece of the CST program for the group

Train the trainer evaluation

Completion rates

10 individuals participated in the train the trainer program. Participants came to the program with a variety of backgrounds and experiences ranging from current and retired veterinarians, past and present veterinary nurses, wellbeing coaches, mental health first aid facilitators and veterinary mentors.

Knowledge gain

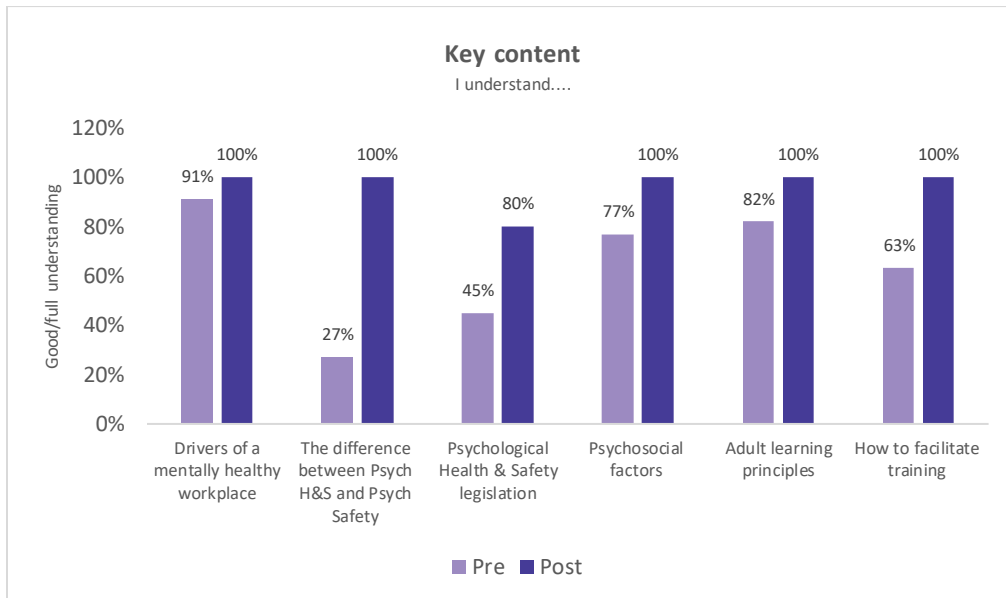
Background research

It was critical for participants to have a good or full understanding of the background research that informed the CST pilot as well as understanding the journey of the pilot itself. Participants knowledge of the 2021 Superfriend Veterinary Wellness research improved by 63% (27% vs 90%), knowledge of the Mental Health & Suicide Prevention Framework by 35% (45% vs 80%) and of the CST pilot program by 46% (45% vs 100%)

Key concepts

Having a thorough understanding of the key concepts covered in the CST program was the most important knowledge gain required through the train-the-trainer 2-day program as knowing the content well translates to increased confidence in being able to explain the concept to another person. On average, knowledge of key concepts increased by 43% as demonstrated in the below graph.

Graph 4 – Knowledge gain relating to key CST concepts



Confidence

Given trainers would be required to facilitate independently in the future an immediate increase in confidence to explain key concepts to another person was a desired outcome from the 2-day course, followed by a sustained increase in confidence which would be measured at 6- and 12-months post training. On average the participant's confidence to explain key concepts to another person in a training session was recorded as 96% confidence immediately post the 2-day train-the-trainer course.

Following the training, on a scale of 1-10 participants rated their confidence to co-facilitate as 8/10, while facilitating independently was at 6.5/10. This sets the trainers up well to follow their learner journey of co-facilitating a CST session with an Aspect Group facilitator, before being signed off to independently facilitate.

Satisfaction

Participants were asked to rate how they enjoyed the train-the-trainer course, pleasingly, 100% of participants felt the training equipped them with skills they needed to facilitate CST in the future, with participants rating the program 4.9 stars out of 5. Participants described the train-the-trainer course as an 'invaluable experience' and a 'great learning environment', one participant said, 'I absolutely loved the training', while another said, 'I look forward to facilitating the training to the wider industry'. Similarly to the CST workshop itself, some participants felt the train-the-trainer course could have been longer with more time to prepare to facilitate. Overall participants felt it was a supportive environment and a fantastic course.

96%

Confident to explain key concepts to another

100%

People feel the TTT equip them to facilitate in the future

4.9

Star rating for the TTT by participants

Conclusion

The future of Cultivating Safe Teams

The Cultivating Safe Teams program now transitions out of the pilot and into business as usual to educate and empower veterinary professionals all across Australia to make work SAFE and GREAT. Key learnings from the pilot have been used to inform the next stage and evolution of CST to ensure a sustainable product that can be scaled up to meet the goal of creating a profession wide movement focused on safe teams where every veterinary professional thrives. Moving forward, CST will be offered to the profession in two ways, CST AWARE and CST ACTION.

CST AWARE will be as close to the pilot workshop as possible, a 1-hour face-to-face or virtual workshop that aims to build early awareness and basic knowledge required to make work a SAFE and GREAT place to be. The aim will be to pass this knowledge onto as many people across the profession as possible to empower individuals to be accountable for the role they play in their own workplaces and ensure workplaces are meeting their obligations to make the veterinary environment safe.

CST ACTION will be focused on implementation, rather than individual awareness. The key aim will be to support workplaces in implementing the actions required to make long-term change to cultivate a safe team and create a mentally healthy workplace, all while upskilling workplace leaders and champions to lead the change and take charge.

More information on the future of CST will be published by AVA in due course.

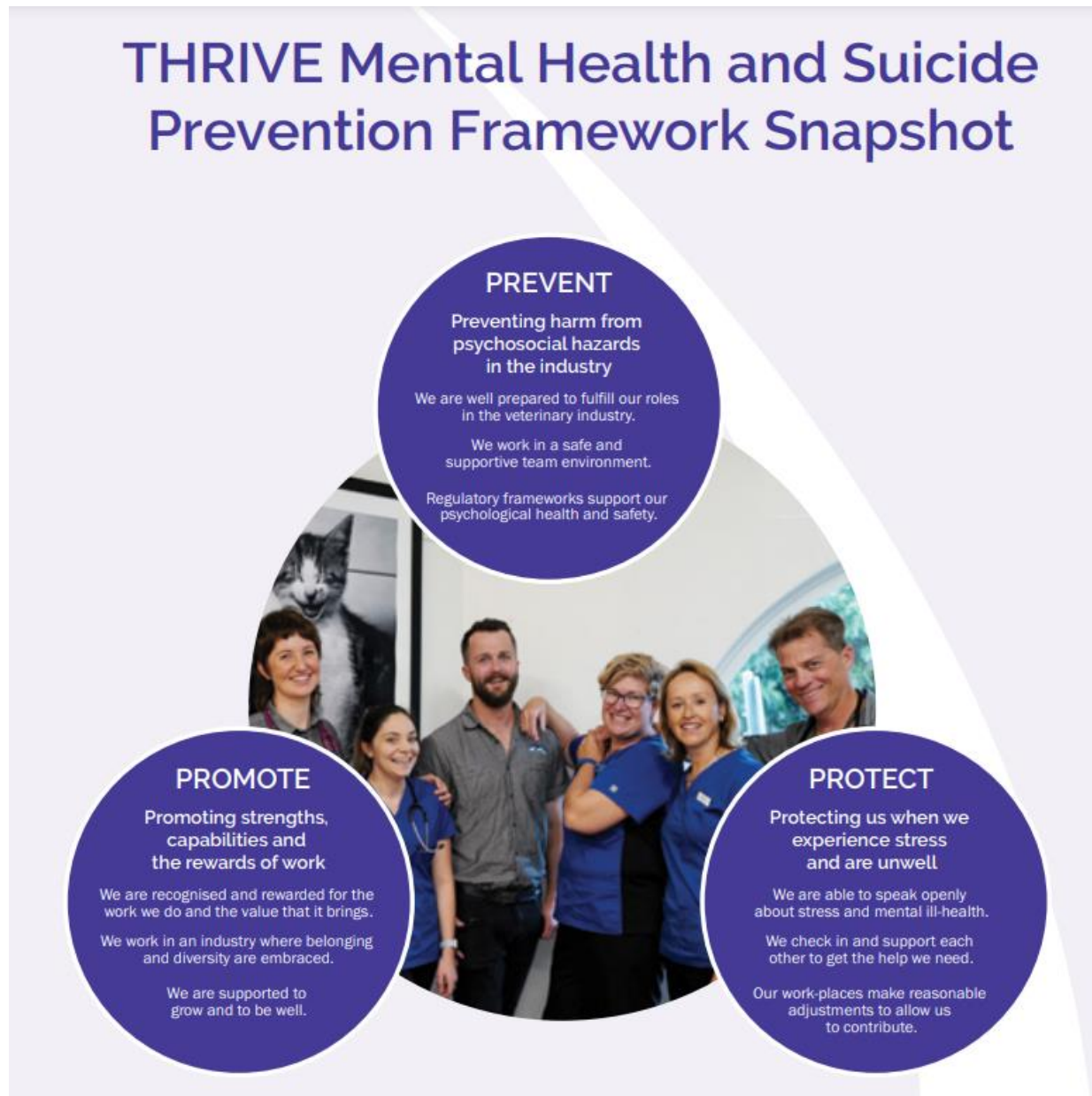
Building and sustaining a thriving veterinary profession

The work towards building a thriving veterinary profession is just getting started. Cultivating Safe Teams has paved the way for veterinary professionals to take control of defining SAFE and GREAT veterinary workplaces of the future, ones that value staff for who they are, prioritise mental health and wellbeing and ensure that work, although stressful and challenging at times, is never harmful. AVA has started this great work for, and with the profession – will you play your part in Cultivating Safe Teams of the future?



Members of the Deniliquin Veterinary Clinic Team

THRIVE Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework Snapshot



PREVENT

Preventing harm from psychosocial hazards in the industry

We are well prepared to fulfill our roles in the veterinary industry.

We work in a safe and supportive team environment.

Regulatory frameworks support our psychological health and safety.

PROMOTE

Promoting strengths, capabilities and the rewards of work

We are recognised and rewarded for the work we do and the value that it brings.

We work in an industry where belonging and diversity are embraced.

We are supported to grow and to be well.

PROTECT

Protecting us when we experience stress and are unwell

We are able to speak openly about stress and mental ill-health.

We check in and support each other to get the help we need.

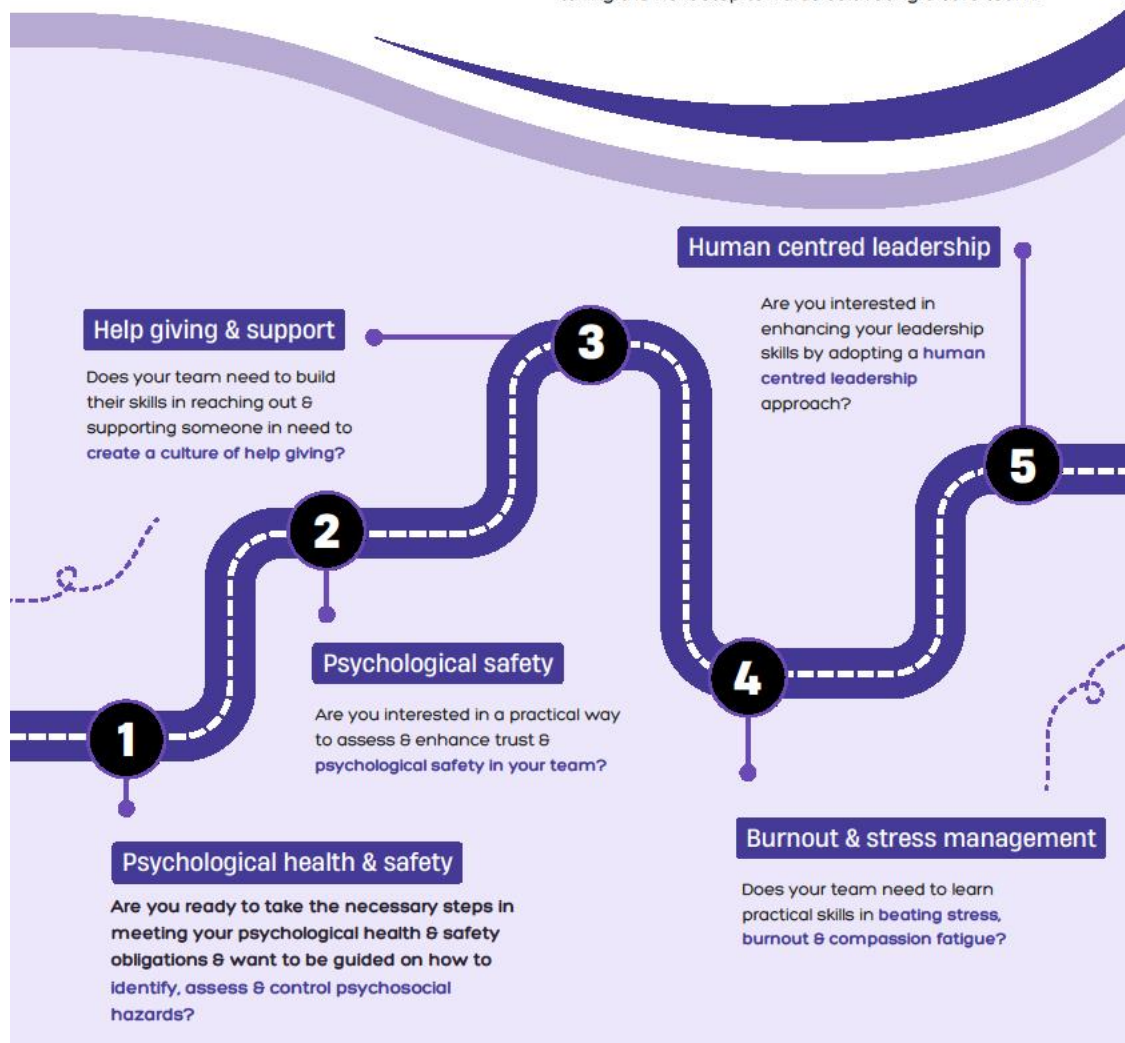
Our work-places make reasonable adjustments to allow us to contribute.

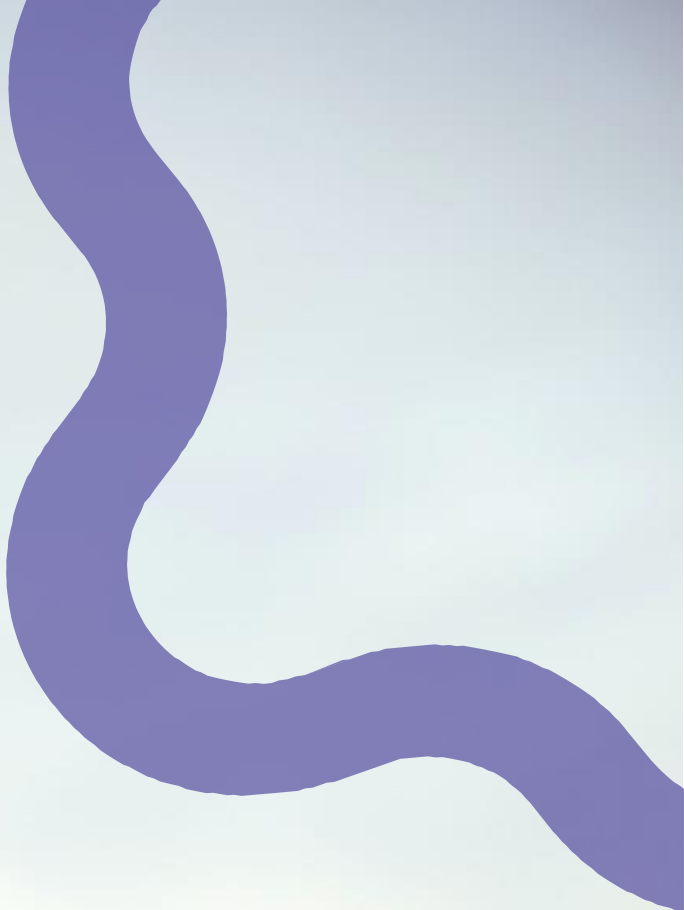


CULTIVATING SAFE TEAMS JOURNEY

Congratulations on completing your Cultivating Safe Teams 1 hour workshop. This workshop is just the beginning in raising the awareness of psychological health & safety across the profession. Taking action starts now!

Every clinic's journey will differ depending on where they are currently at, so choose the path that best suits you in taking the next step towards cultivating a safe team.





Aspect
Group

PSYCHOLOGY AT WORK

