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## **Let's act before it's too late: India action for mental health**

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**A fast-paced environment, the hyper-competitive run to reach the next rung on the corporate ladder, long working hours, insurmountable traffic woes, stress, improper work-life balance - all of those can lead to burnout and depression!**

Mental health in the workplace is a real issue that needs to be addressed both by individuals and workplaces, in all countries, and Arogya World is leading the pace for India.

It is great to see the world recognising the enormity of the problem and wanting to do something about it.

### **Depressing demographics**

India is home to 1.3 billion people — 18% of the world population — and is deeply impacted by mental health issues. It is a young country, with two-thirds of the population less than 35 years old, and includes hundreds of millions of working professionals. Nearly half of India's workforce suffers from stress and 4 out of 10 corporate employees suffer from depression or anxiety. Suicide, especially among women, is a huge concern. There are 230,000 suicides a year in India, and how the country tackles this public health tragedy could dictate whether or not the world meets the SDG goal of reducing the suicide rate by one-third by 2030.

### **Clarion Call for Action**

Arogya World decided to do something about it. As part of their Healthy Workplace program, they have consistently worked to understand organisations' commitments to reducing stress and NCD risk factors. In a multi-stakeholder consultation (Bangalore, 2012) work-life balance was identified as a necessary criterion that marked a company as "healthy". Arogya World has, since then, included work-life balance yardsticks routinely in all their formal Healthy Workplace Assessments (>116 companies, covering 2.5 million employees).

In 2016, they initiated the Platinum Healthy Workplace via which they can analyse employee health data and work with companies to calculate the business benefits of mental health programmes. On 15 Nov 2018, they collaborated with "One Mind At Work" to present a half-day session devoted entirely to mental health in the workplace, during their annual Healthy Workplace Conference, in Bangalore. This was a first for them – and marked a milestone in workplace health in India. Experts spoke about the toll of mental health in working India, the importance of sleep, how patients live and cope with these serious illnesses, and how companies are overcoming mental health stigma.

### **Bangalore statement issued**

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On Day 2, they described case studies (from Wipro and Reliance) on how companies deploy mental health programmes across large employee populations, issued the Bangalore Statement, and facilitated new pledges and commitments from companies. They drew media attention with a press event highlighting speakers from Arogya World and the National Institute of Mental Health & Neurosciences. They advocated for mental health, and landed stories in several media outlets.

Arogya World believe the workplace, where so many Indians spend so much of their day, is a great platform for change, and they will continue doing their bit to mobilise companies to tackle mental health. This is a social imperative, a business imperative, and quite frankly, a must, to maintain the country's competitive position as an economic powerhouse.

Let's act before it's too late.

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