

# Certifying capacity for work - psychological injuries



When a worker has a psychological injury and you have identified they can do some work, you are required to outline the worker’s capacity for work, including reasonable adjustments. This resource will help you to do that.

The Australian Human Rights Commission publication, [2010 Workers with Mental Illness: A practical guide for managers](#) is a useful resource for GPs in describing a worker’s capacity and the prescription of reasonable adjustments. This resource provides you with a summary of common symptoms and reasonable adjustments you could recommend when certifying a worker with some capacity for work.

## Symptoms, behaviours and work

People with psychological injuries can experience difficulties with thinking processes, organisation and planning, social interaction or expressing emotion. Most also experience physical symptoms and changes in functioning. These are summarised in Table 1 below. You can outline your patient’s symptoms on the WorkCover WA certificate of capacity. In outlining your patient’s symptoms, it gives their support network an idea of their experiences and informs work planning.

**Table 1 Mental illness - Common symptoms, difficulties with work performance or observable behaviours**

Difficulties with thinking processes	Difficulties with organisation and planning	Difficulties with social interactions	Difficulties with physical symptoms and functioning	Difficulties with emotions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• concentration</li> <li>• attention to detail</li> <li>• memory</li> <li>• processing information</li> <li>• forming clear thoughts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• planning and carrying out tasks</li> <li>• managing multiple tasks</li> <li>• meeting deadlines</li> <li>• avoiding certain tasks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• avoiding social interactions</li> <li>• avoiding working with colleagues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• blurred vision</li> <li>• pain, tremors or stiffness</li> <li>• heart attack symptoms</li> <li>• feeling sleepy, groggy or fatigued</li> <li>• functioning best at certain times of the day</li> <li>• turning up late for work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• frustrated</li> <li>• stressed</li> <li>• anxious</li> <li>• angry</li> <li>• sensitive to feedback</li> <li>• worried about work</li> <li>• on edge, restless</li> <li>• low mood</li> </ul>



## WorkCover WA certificates of capacity

WorkCover WA's certificates of capacity have dedicated space for GPs to outline the worker's capacity and adjustments you think are necessary to ensure the worker's recovery and resumption of suitable work. This is located in the Work Capacity section of the certificates.

### Certifying capacity and outlining reasonable adjustments

Reasonable adjustments are changes or modifications made to work duties, practices or the workplace that enable a worker to perform their work at their capacity. Employers frequently turn to the medical certificate to inform what work is suitable for the worker to perform. Table 2 provides specific examples you can use when prescribing a worker's capacity due to a psychological injury.

**Table 2 Examples of reasonable adjustments for psychological injury**

Flexible working options	Adjustments to allocating work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• variable start and finish times</li> <li>• working from office and home</li> <li>• allowing short breaks for the worker to clear their mind or relieve physical symptoms</li> <li>• use of a MP3 player or headset to minimise distractions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• writing work instructions down</li> <li>• using diagrams, aids or models to demonstrate work tasks</li> <li>• explaining complex ideas as simply and clearly as possible</li> <li>• breaking complex work down to a number of simpler task</li> </ul>
<b>Adjustments to managing work</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• allowing extra time to complete jobs, projects, tasks or meetings</li> <li>• colour coding or highlight specific information or priorities</li> <li>• developing a written action plan, including milestones and deadlines</li> </ul>	

Adjustments to work environment (physical)	Use of aids or assistive equipment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reducing noise in the work environment</li> <li>providing physical modifications to the work area (e.g. room partitions, soundproofing or visual barriers) to minimise distractions</li> <li>relocating their workstation to a quieter area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>diary, electronic organiser or mobile phone calendar for reminders about key dates, events and meetings</li> <li>keyboard overlays to assist with special functions and shortcuts</li> <li>checklist for the worker to mark off work/tasks they have completed</li> <li>using dictation devices or smart phone applications</li> </ul>

Adjustments to work environment (social)	Extra supervisory or workplace support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>using telephone or email instead of conducting face-to-face meetings</li> <li>swapping tasks or work that requires meetings with clients, customers or business representative for less 'social' activities</li> <li>if the worker is located in a busy area, allowing the worker to work in a quieter location or part-hours at home</li> <li>using a mirror to prevent startling the worker as colleagues approach from behind</li> <li>not making work social activities compulsory for all workers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>scheduled times for the worker to meet with the supervisor</li> <li>using email to provide informal support</li> <li>assigning a mentor with similar skills, knowledge and experience</li> <li>access to an external provider such as the Employee Assistance Provider or workplace rehabilitation program</li> <li>external (and confidential) prompts about (changes in) behaviours (i.e. positive or negative)</li> <li>provide feedback about performance (positive or negative) promptly</li> </ul>

## When you need more information

As the GP, you may also seek more information about reasonable adjustments suitable for your worker by contacting your patient's:

- clinical or counselling psychologist** to understand the goal and mode of intervention (such as exposure therapy for anxiety disorders) that would most complement a sustainable return to work
- employer or workplace rehabilitation provider** to understand what duties (or work conditions) are on offer and/or can be accommodated.

You can also find more information in the resource, [Steps to access your patients workplace information](#), which guides you through how to access more information.