

Media Release

MENTAL HEALTH AND WORK

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Australians spend more hours working than people of any country other than Korea – and they are not happy about it.

This means many people are not participating in other areas of life and it is leading to depression. Latest research shows full-time workers are spending up to 60 hours at work each week to make ends meet, and are less satisfied with their lives than the unemployed, students and volunteers.

VicHealth CEO Dr Rob Moodie said these findings supported several key messages in a new book: *Mental Health and Work: Issues and Perspectives*, launched today at the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VECCI).

The book, produced by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) and The Australian Network for Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention for Mental Health (Auseinet), focuses on issues including youth employment, retirement, bullying and wellbeing.

Speaking at the launch, Dr Moodie said although the link between work and its impact on mental health was not new, alarming new evidence was highlighting the scale of the problem.

“Depression will be the second leading cause of disability in the world by 2020, if we continue along this path,” Dr Moodie told industry representatives. “Recent studies from around the world are showing that working too hard and being stressed will make you sick, not to mention the negative impacts on your family, friends and community.”

The Australian Unity Wellbeing Index report compiled in September 2002 found that people aged 36-55 were commonly working 41-60 hours per week and the 40-hour week was disappearing. “That age group has the lowest levels of personal wellbeing in groupings based on age and has heavy family and financial responsibilities,” Dr Moodie said.

Dr Moodie said many people in this group were working such hours for additional money or conforming to work-place requirements, “both of which diminish their life quality”. Another group was found to be working more than 61 hours per week, but they were mostly females looking after families and expressed high satisfaction from their personal relationships.

The happiest survey group, aged 66 years and older, included volunteers working up to 20 hours per week.

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