

*THE WELLBEING
of ARCHITECTS
culture, identity
+ practice.*

in collaboration with Parlour



Introduction: Guides to Wellbeing in Architecture Practice

1-5

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country and recognise their continuing connections to land, waters and community.

We recognise that their wisdom, culture, and stewardship have sustained the wellbeing of this place for millennia. We pay deep respect to Elders past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to the Indigenous people who are part of the architectural community.

Introducing the Five Guides to Wellbeing in Architecture Practice

The Wellbeing of Architects: Culture, Identity + Practice

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Support

If this guide raises issues for you, we encourage you to seek support:

Your GP, who may be able to refer you to other services

Lifeline: 13 14 14

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636

[Mental Health Australia](http://MentalHealthAustralia)

Introducing the Five Guides to **Wellbeing** in Architecture Practice

Overview

Addressing work-related wellbeing among architectural practitioners is crucial to the future of the profession as a viable, attractive and fulfilling career path, and for realising the benefit that architecture services can bring to communities.

As the profession learns more about the mental wellbeing of its workers, momentum for change is building. At the same time, a path forward in improving the health, safety and happiness of people working in architecture is becoming clearer.

The work of architecture is challenging and demanding. Indeed, this is part of the satisfaction of working in the profession; a difficult and complex job done well, as part of a team, working for the good of others, can be a deeply fulfilling experience. Many architects report that the intensity and challenge of the work, its requirement for complex problem-solving, and their sense of its potential to bring positive change, is why they are so committed to the profession and its ideals.

When the work of architecture is going well, it's as satisfying as any practitioner could hope for. But over time, intensity can lead to exhaustion, complexity can lead to overwhelm, high levels of responsibility can lead to mental distress. The pleasures of architecture practice are inherently entangled with risks for mental wellbeing, which can be either ameliorated or exacerbated by particular work cultures and norms.

It's well established that many architecture practitioners work long hours, often with repeated tight deadlines and high stress, often with intense levels of risk and responsibility, sometimes with poor remuneration and recognition, and with varying degrees of support. This combination of factors can lead to burnout, cynicism, disengagement, and poor mental health.

This means that the work-related wellbeing of members of the architecture profession is not as good as it could or should be. Reasons for this are complex and include the place of architecture as a creative practice at the intersection of the construction and creative industries. Architecture is an old and venerable profession, with a strong sense of community, a well-defined culture, a long history and entrenched traditions and values. But it's clear that the structures and cultures of architecture practice, and how they play out in some workplaces, also play a significant role in perpetuating poor mental wellbeing.

The *Guides to Wellbeing in Architecture Practice* will, we hope, help facilitate change for the better.

Addressed to individuals, practices and the wider profession, the Guides outline the key issues, and provide positive, practical and productive strategies for change.

The Guides are modelled on the award-winning Parlour Guides to Equitable Practice and can be read in conjunction with these.

They are grounded in the findings of *The Wellbeing of Architects* research project, and developed in collaboration with experts and advisors to the project.

Research background

The Wellbeing of Architects research project sprang from the researchers' observation of a strong industry-wide perception, and overwhelming anecdotal evidence, of problems with wellbeing amongst architecture practitioners. Many architecture practices throughout the country were actively investigating and looking to better support mental wellbeing within their own organisations, but they were hampered by a lack of comprehensive, reliable data about what was going on, and how the situation might be improved.

Various groups had acknowledged and attempted to address these issues. The NSW Architects Registration Board (NSW ARB) had commissioned an extensive literature review in 2016 that highlighted the dearth of research around wellbeing among architecture practitioners in Australia (Karklins and Mendoza, *Literature Review: Architects and mental health*).

Key industry publications were also active. *Architecture Australia* and its online counterpart ArchitectureAU had engaged with issues of wellbeing in the profession, with articles and ongoing coverage.

Parlour published early and important articles, and provided a space for public discussion around wellbeing including at the 2019 symposium, Transformations: Action on Equity.

At the same time, industry organisations engaged in advocacy. The Association of Consulting Architects (ACA) led in developing and supporting an Australian version of the Architects Mental Wellbeing Forum from 2020, developing and updating the *Architects Mental Wellbeing Toolkit* for an Australian audience in 2021. The Student Organised Network for Architecture (SONA) within the Australian Institute of Architects also engaged in research and advocacy.

The Wellbeing of Architects research project – also known by its formal title Architectural Work Cultures: professional identity, education and wellbeing (LP190100926) – was initiated in response to this groundswell, and the absence of detailed evidence and data. This Australia-wide study was funded by the Australian Research Council Linkage Projects scheme, 2020–2024.

The project's industry partners included six architectural offices, the NSW ARB, the Australian Institute of Architects, the ACA and the Association of Australasian Schools of Architecture (AASA).

The research team was deliberately interdisciplinary – drawn from RMIT, Monash University's Department of Architecture (Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture) and Department of Management (Faculty of Business and Economics) as well as the NSW ARB.

Using qualitative and quantitative methods, the project undertook two major surveys, in 2021 and 2023, separately addressing architecture practitioners and students.

This looked for an appreciable change over time, and checked for outlying effects due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which was highly disruptive when the 2021 survey was administered. In 2021, 2066 people responded to the survey. In 2023, there were 782 respondents.

In addition to the surveys, focus groups were conducted with practitioners, students and academics in 2022.

Key findings across the research project

- * People engaged in the wellbeing surveys have a lower-than-average quality of life compared with Australian norms, with surprisingly low personal wellbeing scores, a notable degree of psychological distress, and higher-than-average levels of burnout.
- * Half the respondents participating in the 2021 survey (50%) reported that their work in architecture had a generally positive effect on their wellbeing, while 42% reported that their career had a generally negative impact on their wellbeing. This equivalence was reflected in the focus groups. This result highlights the tensions and balances that need to be navigated in relation to this topic.
- * Many participants indicated that a connection to architecture as a creative practice was important to them and an important part of their identity.
- * Better personal wellbeing was most strongly associated with higher levels of career satisfaction, career support, relatedness to others, career optimism, and career balance.
- * Survey respondents generally perceive a high level of control over how they got their work done (autonomy) and identified a strong feeling of having the skills and experience to do their jobs (competency), which contributed to their basic psychological needs.
- * Many respondents felt supported by their immediate supervisors and reported reasonable career satisfaction.
- * Many participants were committed to their profession and took pride in their work but said they would not necessarily recommend a career in architecture to others.
- * Inadequate project resourcing, linked to low fees, was identified as having a chronic ongoing negative influence on wellbeing.
- * A large proportion of those participating in this research were dissatisfied with their level of remuneration, finding it not commensurate with the effort required and demands of the work.
- * Procurement and contracting pressures, generally framed as an influence from the wider construction sector, were identified as being associated with the most acute negative impacts on wellbeing.
- * Many participants reported having high standards for themselves and their work, but felt stymied by barriers preventing the realisation of architecture's full potential.
- * Many participants felt that their work was under-valued by clients, collaborators in the wider construction industry, and society at large.
- * Personal perfectionism was not found to be a significant negative factor affecting wellbeing.
- * The impact of COVID-19 was mixed. Respondents' assessment of their quality of life in 2021 compared with before the pandemic was split closely between those whose wellbeing had worsened (38%), was unchanged (35%), and had improved (27%).
- * Between 2021 and 2023, respondents reflected a significant decline in their professional commitment and personal performance standards. This was matched by a decrease in career optimism, career support and career satisfaction. This suggests that the impact of the pandemic is complex and ongoing.
- * Sole traders reported lower levels of role overload, and a stronger sense of identity and professional commitment than those working in larger practices.

About the Guides

The Guides address five interrelated areas that impact wellbeing, as identified through the research. Together, they seek to support healthier workplaces and practices.

1. Value & Worth

Perceptions of how architecture is valued, how architects value themselves and the values that motivate them impact the overall wellbeing of architects in complex, interconnected ways. A healthy sense of purpose has a positive impact on wellbeing, but challenges arise when this vocational commitment is undermined by the sense that the work of architects is undervalued.

This guide offers advice to individuals, practices and the profession about establishing, articulating and communicating values and value.

2. Time & Money

Skilful business management – appropriate fee setting, sufficient resourcing and reasonable timeline expectations – helps create workplaces in which people thrive.

This guide recognises the interconnection between good business practice, profitability and wellbeing. It outlines ways to improve general wellbeing in practice, with suggestions for employers on resource allocation, fee setting, time management, upskilling and support. It offers individuals useful ideas and advice on communication, training and prioritising life balance. It recommends ways professional organisations can assist in addressing these issues.

3. Trust & Transparency

Trust and transparency are vital to healthy productive workplaces. Trust is established when people have confidence in their colleagues and leaders, while transparency relates to the openness and accuracy of information shared within practice.

This guide investigates the benefits of workplaces that value trust and transparency and shows how this can support work-related wellbeing in practice. It provides guidance for practices, individuals and professional bodies to help support trust and transparency in the profession and explores the challenges involved in implementing workplace change.

4. Risk & Responsibility

The professional risks and responsibilities facing the architecture profession have a significant impact on wellbeing.

The topic of risk and responsibility is wide-ranging and complex. This guide focuses on factors affecting wellbeing, as identified by the research project – procurement processes, timelines and deadlines, fees and contractual arrangements. It provides ideas for practices, individuals and professional organisations on addressing these issues in a way that benefits all.

5. Psychosocial & Psychological Safety

Psychological safety and psychosocial safety are closely connected but distinct concepts that can help cultivate healthy working conditions, and respectful and inclusive workplaces.

This guide introduces and explains these terms, offering suggestions about creating psychologically safe work environments that prioritise open communication, inclusion, belonging and general wellbeing. It outlines legal obligations and explains how to identify and eliminate psychosocial hazards.

Who are the Guides for?

These Guides are for everyone, at any career stage. They are not just for those experiencing challenges or poor mental wellbeing. Even people who are currently flourishing might have ups and downs in future, or have colleagues and friends who need support, or workplaces that could be improved.

Prevention is better than cure, and individuals, practices and professional organisations all have a responsibility to improve wellbeing outcomes. It's incumbent on us all to act.

Everyone has some agency to make improvements, in some arena – whether large or small. The Guides make recommendations for individuals, practices and organisations. They are designed to provide practical guidance for people at all levels, in all sizes of practice, in management as well as employee roles, and in professional organisations.

“The profession is being encroached upon from many directions and while there is huge potential for good in applying our skills to broader areas, making those inroads is difficult. I think we may be in transition and that is hard.”

— Sole trader, 21-30 yrs experience, private practice, SA, 2021

How to use the Guides

The Guides don't need to be read cover to cover, as a full set – it's fine to dip in and out, according to current needs and concerns.

Each Guide begins with an overview of relevant key findings from the Wellbeing of Architects research project, then an Overview, a summary of What is the issue?, a discussion of Why does it matter? and then to the action – What can we do? This last section is divided into advice for Practices, Individuals and The Profession – acknowledging that each of these groups can effect change in different ways.

The Guides use the term 'individuals' broadly to include employees, employers, sole practitioners, managers and all professionals in the architecture workplace.

We recognise that people in these different roles have specific experiences and types of agency. It's also important for everyone to understand others' perspectives – to understand the pressures they face and factors behind their decision making.

Following the 'What can we do' section, each Guide sets out key Rights and Responsibilities, as enshrined in Australian law at the time of writing. It is, however, important for any reader to understand the legal context within which they work. We encourage readers to investigate and understand relevant legislation in their own particular context. Readers are reminded that legislation and Awards change regularly, and are advised to check current legislation to stay up to date.

Finally, each guide provides a list of **Further Resources** and **Further Reading**.

Definitions

Wellbeing

For the purposes of these Guides, wellbeing is understood as a subjective, self-reported measure of feeling. In this we follow the Victorian Department of Health, which describes it as “not just the absence of disease or illness. It is a complex combination of a person’s physical, mental, emotional and social health. Wellbeing is linked to how you feel about yourself and your life.” It’s important to note that this is not a clinical definition – it’s not the kind of thing determined by a doctor, but is rather an individual’s own account of their own perceived, internal state.

The Guides hold the self-reportedness of wellbeing to be part of its value: valuing the subjectivity and specificity of individual experiences.

It’s also important to note this definition of wellbeing doesn’t assume that stress and pressure are necessarily or always negative. On the contrary, they can be the source of great personal growth. A level of stress and pressure are inherent to any demanding professional career, including architecture. But when an individual feels that their wellbeing is being negatively impacted by their work – that is where these Guides come in.

Life balance

The Guides use the phrase ‘life balance’ rather than ‘work-life balance’ – the latter of which tends to frame the personal and professional as a dichotomy, which is not reflective of everyone’s reality. Life balance acknowledges a more integrated approach. It encourages individuals to consider not only their career, but also their health, interests and relationships as part of a system that supports their wellbeing.

What the Guides *don’t* cover

These Guides are offered as a broad overview. There are several things they expressly don’t do:

They are not based on medical research and don’t offer medical advice

The Guides don’t offer mental health diagnosis or advice. They are intended to support activities and behaviours that may have a positive effect in the architectural workplace, but they do not include discussions of mental health diagnosis.

It is essential that anyone who is experiencing mental distress or symptoms of mental ill-health seeks help from a qualified health professional.

They do not address the effects or management of pre-existing mental health conditions

The Guides do not address the effects of pre-diagnosed medical conditions, which are often complex and can be exacerbated by stressful working conditions.

Individuals with pre-existing diagnosed mental health conditions may require specialised care and interventions tailored to their specific needs, and should consult a qualified mental health professional.

They do not comprise formal legal, employment, risk, HR or insurance advice

The Guides do not offer formal advice in terms of legal obligations, human resources management and risk. They are not a substitute for informed, accredited advice.

Individuals and practices should seek specific, specialised advice relevant to their situation, regarding wellbeing, employment and human resources policy, from their legal, HR or other business adviser, or mental health professional.

They don't address architectural education or the role of the universities

The Wellbeing of Architects research project was designed to understand architectural practice in a continuum with education – given the often-stated belief that poor wellbeing and time-management practices are initially inculcated during architectural education. The project undertook extensive research with architecture students, and also to a lesser extent with academics. The findings of this research are published separately.

They don't explicitly address neurodiversity

In the contemporary workplace there are people with many and diverse neurotypes, each with their own strengths and challenges. The Guides do not consider neurodivergence within a frame of illness, disability or deficit – rather as part of the valuable diversity of people within the profession. Of course, people with particular conditions have specific needs and require accommodations.

A Guide to engaging and supporting neurodiverse groups in the architectural workplace would be a very valuable resource. However, this is outside the scope of the Wellbeing of Architects research project and these Guides.

They touch upon, but don't go into depth on, intersectionality

The wellbeing of members of under-represented or marginalised groups is clearly under greater duress than the general population. Different identity markers such as class, race and gender can intersect in complex and sometimes compounding ways, with tangible effects on wellbeing. One thing that's clear is that work practices intended to support the most marginal and at-risk populations are beneficial to everyone. So, while the Guides touch on the increased load carried by under-represented communities in places, this is not a specific focus – and is an area where further work is required.

They touch upon, but don't go into depth about, factors in the wider world affecting wellbeing

Clearly wellbeing in the workplace can not be seen in isolation from the whole person and the wider world that they occupy. Making a hard distinction between the 'personal' and 'professional' realms is not productive, nor realistic. And while there may be both positive and negative influences on wellbeing in an individual's personal life – for example, in the quality of their personal relationships – there are also influences from the world at large, such as social media, climate change and geopolitical unrest. It is beyond the scope of the Guides to address all of these elements. The Guides focus on factors in architecture workplaces that are under the control of people and practices.

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If the guides raise issues for you

The Guides are not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment.

Readers are encouraged to seek support from mental health professionals for personalised guidance tailored to their individual needs and circumstances.

If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis or requires immediate assistance, please contact emergency services or seek help from a mental health provider immediately. Seeking timely support can make a significant difference in managing mental health challenges and promoting overall wellbeing.

Help is available.

For emergency services dial 000

Lifeline Australia

Lifeline is a national service that provides people experiencing a personal crisis with access to 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention.

Call 13 11 14

Beyond Blue Support Service

This service provides 24/7 access to brief counselling sessions, typically lasting 20 minutes.

Call a counsellor on 1300 22 4636

SANE Australia

[SANE Australia](#) provides support and community to people with complex mental health issues. The SANE Australia Forums are a supportive community providing a safe, non-judgemental space to share your experiences, seek advice, and find community.

Mates in Construction Helpline

[Mates in Construction](#) has a free 24/7 helpline for anyone connected to the construction industry. This includes architects and the family of workers. There free case management to help people get connected to appropriate supports.

Call the helpline on 1300 642 111

Further resources

Each guide includes a set of further resources specific to the topic. General resources and readings that provide insights, perspectives and practical suggestions are suggested here.

[The Architects Mental Wellbeing Forum \(Australia\)](#)

Hosted by the ACA, the AMWF aims to raise awareness of mental health issues within the profession and to create a supportive community of practitioners in each state to share knowledge, experiences, research and strategies in a bid to support architects' mental wellbeing in the workplace.

[Architects Mental Wellbeing Toolkit \(Australian version\)](#)

Adapted from the well-known UK toolkit, this includes local resources and offers simple practical advice to individuals and practices on coping with the stresses of an increasingly pressured profession. The Toolkit covers eight key themes, including Office Culture and Overtime, Support Systems and Staff Education, Technology, the Physical Office Environment and Promoting a Healthy Workplace.

[Mentally Healthy Workplaces](#)

This platform is an outcome of the National Workplace Initiative, and is designed to share up-to-date information and resources for mentally healthy workplaces in Australia.

[Black Dog Institute - Workplace Wellbeing](#)

The Black Dog Institute provides an extensive range of resources, practical guidance and research on workplace wellbeing.

[Beyond Blue - Workplace Mental Health](#)

Beyond Blue is a well-known and trusted mental health organisation, providing programs, research, and resources to improve the mental health of workers in Australia and promote the benefits of mentally healthy workplaces.

[Parlour Guides to Equitable Practice](#)

Addressed to practices, employees and the wider profession, the Guides to Equitable Practice outline the key issues facing women in architectural workplaces and provide positive, productive strategies and suggestions for change.

Further readings

[The Wellbeing of Architects](#)

The research project website collates a wide range of publications, links to resources and services, and primary research reports from the Wellbeing of Architects research project undertaken 2020-2024.

[Mental Health and the Workplace](#)

This 2022 report, published by the Centre for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA), focuses on the benefits to businesses, individuals and communities from investing in mental wellbeing in the workplace.

[Association of Consulting Architects Australia](#)

The ACA has published articles, research and resources on mental wellbeing in the workplace with a particular focus on the business of architecture. They host the Architects Mental Wellbeing Forum, and have published the Australian adaptation of the Architects Mental Wellbeing Toolkit.

[Parlour](#)

Parlour has published a diverse collection of articles, research and resources on wellbeing and mental health in the profession.

[Managing Psychosocial Hazards](#)

This Safework Australia website provides guidance on managing psychosocial hazards (anything that could harm someone's mental health) in accordance with Work Health and Safety laws.

It is important that the architectural community fosters open conversations about work-related wellbeing.

Get started!

Each Guide provides detailed advice on improving conditions for healthy workplaces in architecture.

Recurring suggestions broadly relevant include the following.

Individuals

- * Prioritise your wellbeing and life balance.
- * Value your work and that of your colleagues, employees and the profession.
- * Model behaviour and practices that recognise the importance of mental wellbeing in workplaces and professional settings.
- * Seek out training to support business management, and view business management through a wellbeing lens.
- * Seek out training and support on mental health education and resilience.

Practices

- * Fulfil your legal obligations!
- * Understand the ethical and the business cases for improved wellbeing in the workplace. Understand how your own practice works, being sensitive to how its structure, management and leadership model affect wellbeing issues.
- * Create a Mental Health Strategy and openly communicate this to staff, highlighting how the practice promotes, supports and offers guidance.

- * Familiarise yourself and your organisation with the research, services and resources available to support the wellbeing of individuals, workplaces and the wider professional community.
- * Host a practice network event/casual meet up/reading group to discuss each of the Guides to Wellbeing in Practice.
- * Create or provide access to safe spaces and forums for conversations about mental wellbeing.
- * Consider offering an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for support.
- * Nominate staff and provide time to complete the Mental Health First Aid Training program.
- * Implement a paid wellbeing day for all staff once every few months, rotating the schedule among employees.
- * Provide support for employees returning to work after experiencing work-related mental wellbeing issues.

The Profession

- * Consider how the positives of working in architecture can be recognised and supported, for instance community contribution, lifelong learning, and collaboration.
- * Have robust and equitable policies and procedures to support wellbeing in the profession, which can be understood and used by all.
- * Ensure you and your organisation comply with Work Health and Safety legislation that protects psychosocial safety in the workplace.
- * Implement workplace policies for flexibility and work-from-home arrangements.
- * Understand and communicate the value of architectural work through data, media, case studies, and client interactions.

Many people have contributed to making these guides, but special mention must go to the two primary authors, Susie Ashworth and Alison McFadyen, who have done a truly enormous amount of work including extensive research, summary and synthesis, and drawing on their own experience, to produce Guides that are equally readable and useful – and that balance a nuanced understanding of the challenges, with a focus on positive and productive change. Susie and Alison have managed the whole process with grace and good cheer, and we thank them deeply for their service to these Guides, and to the profession more broadly.

A heartfelt thanks must also go to Justine Clark who has taken every role on these Guides from publisher to editor to author to copyfitter – not only displaying her breadth of range and depth of skill in strategic communications, but also the critical and creative eye that makes her such a powerful force for good in Australian architecture.

Research partners



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You are welcome to contact the research team via the project website:

thewellbeingofarchitects.org.au

We are grateful for the engagement of the many members of the Australian architectural community who gave up their time to participate in the interviews, surveys, focus groups and discussions associated with this research.

All practitioner quotes in this guide are drawn from the two surveys and the focus groups that were part of this primary research.

The guides were written by Susie Ashworth, Alison McFadyen and Justine Clark, with input from Naomi Stead, Byron Kinnaird, Maryam Gusheh, Kirsten Orr, and other members of the team.

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