



**Australasian Faculty of Occupational & Environmental Medicine (AFOEM)
Royal Australasian College of Physicians**

Consensus Statement Background

Achieving consensus amongst diverse stakeholders is always challenging. In this (hopefully) final iteration of the Consensus Statement, we have striven to ensure that the central message (that work is generally good for health and wellbeing) is clearly conveyed, while also shoring up the broad support necessary to bring this message home to Australian and New Zealand communities. In order to make the Consensus Statement accessible and media-friendly, we have also sought to limit the text to one page.

AFOEM's intent has not been to produce an exhaustive description of the relationship between health and work, but rather to harness the power of consensus to promote an evidence-based message that will improve public health. Thus, we have not been able to incorporate all the feedback received, and there have been some difficult excisions. Nevertheless, we believe that with your support, the revised Consensus Statement will make a substantial contribution to the health and wellbeing of Australians and New Zealanders.

Key changes include:

- A clear articulation of the motivation behind the Consensus Statement, which is “a shared desire to improve the welfare of individuals, families and communities”.
- Acknowledgement that “Work practices, workplace culture, work-life balance, injury management programs and relationships within workplaces are key determinates, not only of whether people feel valued and supported in their work roles, but also of individual health, wellbeing and productivity.”
- Acknowledgement that, for health professionals, patient advocacy “includes, but is not limited to,” awareness of the health benefits of work.
- A simplification of the call to action present in the first iteration of the Consensus Statement, accompanied by an acknowledgement that signatories only agree to take actions relevant to their various areas of responsibility.

Background to the Consensus Statement

The Consensus Statement fulfils a recommendation of AFOEM's position statement, *Realising the health benefits of work*. *Realising the health benefits of work* presents compelling international and Australasian evidence that work is generally good for health and wellbeing, and that long term work absence, work disability and unemployment generally have a negative impact on health and wellbeing.

Realising the health benefits of work has been endorsed by the Committee of the Presidents of the Medical Colleges, representing:

Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists
The Australasian College of Dermatologists
The Australasian College for Emergency Medicine
The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners

The Royal Australasian College of Medical Administrators
College of Intensive Care Medicine of Australia and New Zealand
The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists
The Royal Australasian College of Physicians
The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists
The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists
Royal Australasian College of Surgeons

Realising the health benefits of work is available on the [Faculty web page](#).

Rationale for consensus

Despite the firm evidence base, and the good work and good intentions of many stakeholders, *Realising the health benefits of work* also shows that the message that 'work is generally good for health' has not yet achieved widespread acceptance in Australia or New Zealand. This is having a negative impact on the health of Australian and New Zealand workers, as well as on the health of those Australians and New Zealanders who are not currently working because of disability or other disadvantage. A comprehensive shift in thinking and practice is required, but will not be achieved if we continue to speak only as individuals and individual organisations.

Consensus amongst diverse stakeholders is a powerful and empowering tool. AFOEM believes the *Australian/New Zealand Consensus Statement on the Health Benefits of Work* provides an opportunity to improve the health and wellbeing of workers and their families by demonstrating that medical, nursing and allied professionals, unions, government authorities, business groups and other stakeholders are willing to work together to realise the health benefits of work.

Support for the Consensus Statement

UK health reformer Professor Dame Carol Black has championed AFOEM's efforts in this regard, as have the many stakeholders who have already provisionally endorsed the Consensus Statement.

In the personal view of Kevin Morris, Director of Clinical Services at New Zealand's Accident Compensation Corporation, "The strength of the evidence that has been documented in the Faculty position paper *Realising the Health Benefits of Work* is such that a call to action on all fronts by all stakeholders is needed. To not take heed of this body of evidence is to put many individuals, families and communities at risk of the well documented health consequences of worklessness. I congratulate the Faculty for the consensus initiative and would encourage all stakeholders to consider the Consensus Statement carefully with a view to providing their support."

Groups who have indicated a willingness to be signatories include:

- In New Zealand: the NZMA, NZAOT, NZ Council of Trade Unions, the NZ Association of Accredited Employers, Business New Zealand and the NZ Institute of Safety Management, among many others; and
- In Australia: Safe Work Australia, WorkCover NSW, the Safety Institute of Australia, the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, the Mental Health Council of Australia, the Australian Nurses Federation and the Business Council of Australia.

Process for achieving consensus

During her October visit to Australia, Professor Dame Carol Black championed the consensus statement in meetings with Comcare, the Australian Medical Association, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Medibank Private and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), and informally with other groups, including the Business Council of Australia. The attached consensus statement takes into account feedback received during these discussions, as well as via the broader consultation process, of which you have been a part.

Final steps

Pending your prompt response to this email, AFOEM will launch the Consensus Statement in both New Zealand and Australia in March 2011, to coincide with a proposed visit by Dame Carol.

We request your formal endorsement, by **21 January, 2011**.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. The Faculty would particularly like to thank the many organisations and individuals who have contributed to the development of the Consensus Statement, and to other initiatives that have grown out of *Realising the Health Benefits of Work*.

We look forward to continuing to work with you on this important project.

Kind regards,

Professor John Kolbe
President, Royal Australasian College of Physicians

Dr Robin Chase
President, Australasian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine

Dr David Beaumont
Chair, Faculty Policy and Advocacy Committee