



22 October, 2019

New research report on mental wellbeing in small businesses

Kia Ora Sue,

Today, Xero and the Mental Health Foundation are releasing a [jointly commissioned research report](#) that seeks to better understand and start to address the state of mental wellbeing in Kiwi small businesses.

Xero entered into this research project with the Mental Health Foundation as we were increasingly concerned about mental wellbeing within small businesses. Unfortunately, our concerns have been well founded.

I won't paraphrase the report at length, but of most concern was the finding that nearly 40 per cent of small business owners say running a small business has negatively impacted their mental health. Another 40 per cent didn't feel it was their responsibility to support staff mental wellbeing.

While large employers and corporates have made real progress in supporting staff wellbeing and understand the link between healthy, engaged staff and productive, profitable workplaces, many small businesses simply don't know where to start.

For example, less than half of all small business owners monitor staff hours or try to manage long hours. Less than one third of small business owners believe their teams would benefit from improved mental wellbeing.

The research report paints a concerning picture for the mental wellbeing of a huge part of the New Zealand workforce. It highlights the inability of small business owners to effectively lead people they employ through mental health challenges or to look after their own wellbeing.

With new clarity around the scale of the mental wellbeing challenge in our small business economy, our focus now is on what we do about it. In short, every single person has a role to play, but some organisations are able to support improved wellbeing at scale.

Xero has recently piloted a scheme called XAP (Xero Assistance Programme) which extends a free counselling and support service to 5,000 small business owners, their staff and their families. Under this pilot, users have access to face-to-face, on-line or telephone counselling support services. It is fully funded by Xero as part of our commitment to small businesses.

We see this kind of service as being a vitally important early intervention tool that, if well used, can protect and enhance mental wellbeing and prevent the development of more significant mental health issues.

As a result of this research, and informed by data from our XAP pilot programme, Xero has decided to fund the extension of the XAP programme to a much wider pool of its small business customers. Through a much larger group of small business owners, their staff and the families of their staff, this direct counselling support service will now be available at no charge to approximately 850,000 Kiwis.

We feel very fortunate to be in a position to be able to make this kind of contribution, but we are very clear that this does not fix the problem in and of itself. One of my requests for this research was that we used it to give clear advice and suggestions on how small businesses can support mental wellbeing.

I am very keen to use this research to drive better mental wellbeing in small businesses across New Zealand. We now have a clear understanding of the problem and what works in helping protect and enhance wellbeing.

If every single small business in New Zealand took away just one action in this report to support better mental health outcomes, we'd be a much happier, healthier and productive country.

I would appreciate your thoughts on this research and am keen to understand how our organisations could work together for the betterment of New Zealand. It might be as simple as sharing this report with the small businesses you work with, or there might be a bigger opportunity to work on.

It's unmistakable that we have an opportunity to deliver more wellbeing solutions that the small businesses sector so clearly needs, and that lifting wellbeing in this country requires input from us all.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Craig Hudson', with a large, stylized initial 'C'.

Craig Hudson
Managing Director, New Zealand & Pacific Islands
Xero