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A person with narrow vision has a restricted horizon; a person with wide vision has plentiful opportunities

Beyond “She’ll be right”: Building the Habit of Health for the Next Generation of Workplace Health

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What if the very people responsible for protecting workplace health and safety are unintentionally standing in the way of support?

WorkSafe New Zealand's *2025 Workforce Insights Programme*, surveying 1,643 employers and 1,824 workers, revealed a concerning disconnect. While 88% of employers believed health and safety risks were discussed openly and helpfully, only 64% of workers agreed.

This 24-percentage-point perception gap raises an uncomfortable question for health and safety professionals: Are we opening pathways to support, or becoming the gatekeepers who prevent people from accessing it?

With five generations in New Zealand's workforce and increasing cultural diversity, workers communicate concerns and seek support differently. Complex reporting processes, delayed responses and assumptions about what workers need can discourage early help-seeking, allowing injuries, burnout and psychosocial risks to escalate.

Drawing on Habit Health's experience in occupational health, injury management, rehabilitation and Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) services, the presentation highlights the value of early intervention.

Habit Health's rehabilitation programme reported reductions in average compensation days from 147 to 56, average claim costs from $23,500 to $14,100, and return-to-work time from 238 to 118 days, alongside patient satisfaction of 9.6/10.

Drawing from the success of the program while challenging traditional approaches, I introduce the G.A.T.E. framework. Through this I am encouraging health and safety professionals to:

G: Give permission to speak up.

A: Ask and act early when warning signs emerge.

T: Tailor pathways to individual needs.

E: Evidence the response and demonstrate tangible improvements.

Through timely clinical intervention, accessible counselling, workplace rehabilitation and proactive occupational health support, Habit Health demonstrates how organisations can turn early warning signs into meaningful action.

Every health and safety professional influences the gate. The question is whether your actions are helping people walk through it.