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Focus on mind health

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OPINION ROB CARRUTHERS



Health and safety is always the number one priority for WA's mining and resources sector — and that's one of the reasons why the Chamber of Minerals and Energy of WA is so proud to have launched the Resourceful Mind program in partnership with Lifeline WA.

Of course, health and safety comes in many guises, something that is reflected in the fact Resourceful Mind is very much focused on the mental health of our sector's workers, nearly 79,000 of whom work in either the Pilbara or the Kimberley.

In a nutshell, the program seeks to identify and engage with workers on operational sites, who might be "go-to" people for colleagues looking for a shoulder to lean on or just to talk through what is going on in their lives.

Through a series of educational modules delivered by Lifeline WA's telephone crisis counsellors, the aim is to better equip these "minders" (as the program calls them) with the skills to have important and sensitive conversations around mental health issues, and, where necessary, the ability to steer their colleagues towards more formal support.

It's taken a lot of hard work to get Resourceful Mind into its current pilot program format, and both CME and Lifeline WA are very grateful to the member companies who are already using it: Roy

Hill, Mineral Resources, Woodside and Simcoa.

Their pilot experiences will help further shape the program as we move towards what we hope will be a broader rollout across the wider sector in 2022.

It goes without saying that mental health is one of the key challenges for modern society.

But it's especially crucial to the mining and resources sector, where our FIFO contingent in particular operate in an environment that poses unique challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic has at times meant workers have had to spend longer than normal away from families, and in some ways that has brought the need for a program like Resourceful Mind into even sharper focus.

Our sector has long focused on zero harm as a key operational target but we know that health and safety is about much more than just physical wellbeing.

We look forward to Resourceful Mind helping deliver positive mental health outcomes in the months and years ahead, and thank all our Minders — the 131 we currently have and those who will enrol in the future — for the interest they are showing in their colleagues' wellbeing. It's because of people like you that our sector thrives the way it does.

On another health and safety matter, it was great to hear about the success of the community COVID vaccination clinics recently held in Karratha — supported by CME member companies FMG, Monadelphous, Rio

Tinto, Woodside, Yara, and also Pilbara Ports Authority and a variety of community and government partners.

This Karratha clinic will be operating again between November 6 and 18, and adds to facilities that have run in Tom Price, Paraburdoo, Newman, Port Hedland and South Hedland, with more Pilbara pop-up clinics still to come.

As Premier Mark McGowan recently noted "vaccination is the only way out of this pandemic."

It's also the key to keeping you, your friends and family, and the broader community as safe as possible when borders reopen.

Rob Carruthers is the Chamber of Minerals and Energy WA policy and advocacy director