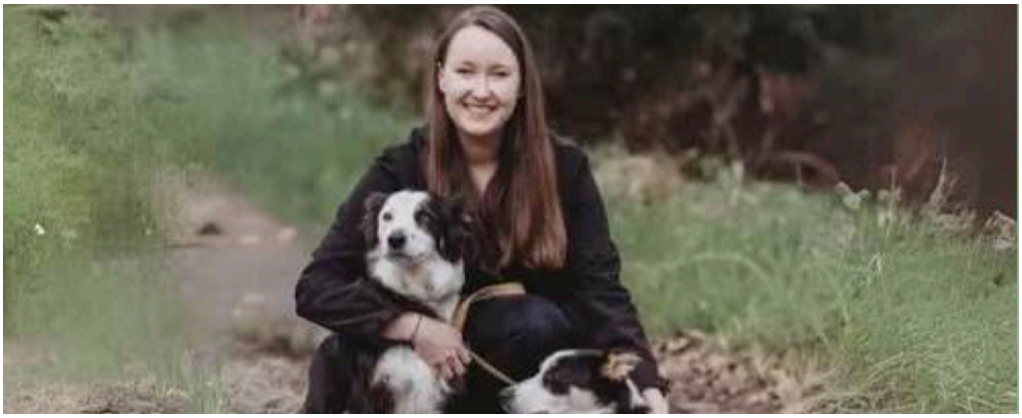
THE VETS ON FIRE

BURNOUT RECOVERY

Preventing and Addressing Burnout

A self-paced stream for veterinary professionals

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Welcome

This is a flexible, self-paced learning experience designed to help you understand burnout, recognise the signs early, and build practical strategies to protect your wellbeing.

You might be feeling overwhelmed right now, or you might want to build healthier ways of working before things get that far. Either way, work through it at your own pace and act when you're ready.

If you're in crisis or immediate danger, call 000. For 24/7 support, call Lifeline on **13 11 14**. More services are listed on the Where to Get Help page.

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BURNOUT RECOVERY

This stream explores four important areas

01
Understand
Mental health and wellbeing

02
Recognise
Your own signs and potential contributors to burnout

03
Respond
Practical strategies for managing demands and protecting recovery

04
Connect
Knowing when and where to seek additional support

Contents

Allow about 2½ to 3 hours in total. It's self-paced, so go module by module and come back any time. Unfamiliar terms are explained in the Glossary at the back.

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Before You Begin: Where to Get Help

Working through this stream may bring up difficult feelings. You don't have to work through them alone. Reach out at any time.

If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call 000. For 24/7 crisis support, call Lifeline on **13 11 14**.

000
Emergency services
Immediate danger or a life-threatening situation.

13 11 14
Lifeline
24/7 crisis support and suicide prevention.

1300 659 467
Suicide Call Back Service
24/7 phone and online counselling.

1300 22 4636
Beyond Blue
24/7 support for anxiety, depression and wellbeing.

1300 78 99 78
MensLine Australia
24/7 counselling for men.

13 92 76
13YARN
24/7 crisis support from Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Crisis Supporters.

1300 687 327
AVA Wellbeing Service
Delivered by Converge International: 24/7 urgent counselling and booked sessions for AVA members and their household.

Your GP
Mental Health Treatment Plan
Ask about Medicare-subsidised sessions with a psychologist.

Your workplace
Employee Assistance Program
Many employers offer free, confidential counselling.

AVA THRIVE
ava.com.au/thrive
Wellbeing programs and training for veterinary teams.

Numbers checked November 2026. Services can change, so if a number doesn't connect, check the provider's website.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION This resource contains general information and personal reflections only. It is not medical, psychological, legal, financial or tax advice, and it does not replace advice from a qualified professional who knows your circumstances.

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MODULE ONE *ABOUT 15 TO 20 MIN*

01

Mental Health Support

Looking After Your Mental Health

Your mental health is an important part of your overall wellbeing. Understanding when you may need additional support and knowing where to find it can make a meaningful difference.

This module provides practical guidance on

- Recognising changes in mood, motivation, energy and wellbeing
- Understanding when everyday stress may be becoming a bigger concern
- Developing healthy habits that support mental wellbeing
- Identifying trusted people you can talk to
- Knowing when professional support may be appropriate
- Finding appropriate mental health and wellbeing resources

TAKEAWAY

Build awareness of your mental health and develop a personal support network before you reach crisis point.

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What Is Mental Wellbeing?

Mental wellbeing is more than simply the absence of mental illness. It includes how we manage everyday challenges, connect with others, experience emotions and maintain a sense of purpose and balance.

Our wellbeing can change over time. Work pressures, relationships, financial concerns, major life events, physical health, lack of sleep and prolonged stress can all affect how we feel and function.

There is no single definition of what "healthy" looks like for everyone. An important first step is understanding what is normal for you and noticing meaningful changes.

REFLECTION

Ask yourself

How have I been feeling recently?

What gives me energy?

What tends to drain my energy?

Have there been changes in my sleep, motivation or mood?

Am I spending enough time doing things that matter to me?

Who do I feel comfortable talking to when things are difficult?

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MODULE TWO *ABOUT 50 TO 60 MIN*

02

Recognising What Is Happening

Understanding Burnout and Wellbeing

Burnout is commonly associated with prolonged exposure to demanding or stressful circumstances, particularly when people have insufficient opportunities for recovery.

Understanding burnout can help you recognise patterns earlier and identify what may need to change.

In this module

- How burnout develops
- Recognising the signs
- Everyday stress vs. burnout
- What contributes to burnout
- Effects on relationships, performance and wellbeing
- Your early warning signs
- Reflecting on your current wellbeing

TAKEAWAY

Develop a clearer understanding of burnout and recognise your personal early-warning signs.

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How Burnout Develops

Burnout is a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion associated with prolonged or excessive stress, particularly when a person feels they have insufficient time, resources, control or recovery.

Burnout usually develops gradually rather than appearing overnight. A common pattern is:

01 High demands
Sustained workload, emotional demands, responsibility or pressure.

02 Reduced recovery
Inadequate sleep, breaks, leisure or time away from demands.

03 Ongoing strain
Stress becomes persistent and the person has fewer opportunities to recover.

04 Exhaustion and disengagement
Energy, motivation and emotional capacity decline.

05 Reduced effectiveness
Concentration, performance and sense of accomplishment can suffer.

Burnout isn't simply a sign that someone has been "working too hard"; it can arise when demands remain high while the resources available to cope and recover are insufficient.

FROM MY EXPERIENCE

"I soon found myself working more than I had the capacity for. The intensity of the case loads began to impact my mental state. I was becoming easily irritable and short-tempered. I felt exhausted and my enthusiasm was dissipating."

DR SARAH WEBB, CONQUERING BURNOUT

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Recognising the Signs

Burnout can show up differently from person to person, and can affect several areas at once.

Physical

- Persistent tiredness
- Changes in sleep
- Feeling physically depleted
- Difficulty recovering after rest
- Headaches or muscle tension

Emotional

- Irritability and frustration
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Reduced enjoyment
- Emotional exhaustion
- Emotional numbness

Cognitive

- Difficulty concentrating
- Forgetfulness
- Reduced motivation
- Feeling unable to make decisions
- Feeling mentally foggy

Behavioural

- Withdrawing from others
- Avoiding tasks or procrastinating
- Working longer hours
- Finding it difficult to switch off
- Losing interest in activities you normally enjoy
- Relying more heavily on unhealthy coping strategies

Work or Study

Reduced motivation, productivity, creativity or sense of achievement.

> These experiences can also occur with other physical or mental health conditions. If you are concerned about your symptoms or they are significantly affecting your life, consider seeking professional advice.

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Everyday Stress vs. Burnout

Everyday stress	Burnout
Often linked to a specific situation or period	Usually develops from prolonged, unmanaged demands
Energy may return after rest or the stressful situation ends	Rest may not fully restore energy
You may feel worried, pressured or tense	You may feel exhausted, detached, cynical or emotionally depleted
Motivation can remain intact	Motivation and sense of effectiveness may decline
Usually temporary	Can become persistent and significantly affect functioning

Stress and burnout can overlap, and experiencing stress does not automatically mean you are burned out.

Effects on Relationships, Performance and Wellbeing

Relationships

Burnout can reduce patience and emotional availability. Someone who is depleted may withdraw, become more irritable or have less capacity to communicate and connect with others.

Performance

Reduced concentration, motivation, memory, creativity and decision-making. A person may also make more mistakes or take longer to complete tasks.

Overall Wellbeing

Prolonged burnout can interfere with sleep, physical activity, enjoyment, emotional wellbeing and the ability to maintain healthy routines.

Persistent exhaustion or significant changes in mood should not automatically be attributed to burnout, because other physical or mental health conditions can produce similar symptoms.

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What Contributes to Burnout?

Burnout is rarely caused by one thing.

Potential contributors can include:

Sustained workload | Lack of control or autonomy | Unrealistic expectations | Lack of recognition or support | Difficulty maintaining boundaries | Conflict | Insufficient recovery time | Ongoing uncertainty or change | Personal responsibilities outside work

Workplace factors

- Excessive or consistently high workload
- Long or unpredictable hours
- Lack of control over how work is performed
- Unrealistic deadlines or unclear expectations
- Insufficient staffing or resources
- Lack of recognition or support
- Workplace conflict or poor communication
- Limited opportunities for breaks, recovery or leave
- A mismatch between personal values and workplace demands

Personal and life factors

- Caring responsibilities
- Financial or relationship pressures
- Perfectionism or very high self-expectations
- Difficulty setting boundaries
- Poor sleep or inadequate recovery
- Taking on too many responsibilities
- Limited social support
- Major or prolonged life changes

Often, burnout reflects an interaction between workplace circumstances and personal circumstances rather than one single cause.

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ACTIVITY

What's Taking Energy From You Currently?

Create two lists.

Things currently draining my energy

Things currently restoring my energy

Now consider

What could I reduce?

What could I increase?

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Early Warning Signs Not to Ignore

Pay particular attention when you notice:

- You are tired even after getting adequate opportunities to rest.
- Things you normally enjoy no longer feel enjoyable.
- You are becoming unusually cynical, detached or irritable.
- Small tasks feel disproportionately difficult.
- Your concentration or memory is noticeably worse.
- You are increasingly withdrawing from friends, family or colleagues.
- You regularly think, "I just need to get through this week," but the weeks keep accumulating.
- You have stopped taking meaningful breaks or using leave because you feel you cannot step away.
- Your sleep, eating, exercise or other routines are deteriorating.
- You feel that your usual coping strategies aren't working anymore.

Early recognition matters because addressing the underlying demands and recovery needs is generally easier before exhaustion becomes more entrenched.

ACTIVITY

Identify Your Early Warning Signs

Everyone's warning signs can be different. When I'm starting to struggle, I notice...

My body: _____

My thoughts: _____

My emotions: _____

My behaviour: _____

My relationships: _____

My work: _____

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Reflecting on Your Current Wellbeing

A useful self-check is to consider the following questions:

Energy

- How physically and mentally energised do I feel most days?
- Am I recovering adequately between demanding periods?

Emotions

- How often do I feel overwhelmed, irritable, detached or emotionally drained?
- Am I still experiencing enjoyment and positive emotions?

Thinking

- Can I concentrate and make ordinary decisions?
- Am I making more mistakes or struggling with tasks that usually feel manageable?

Boundaries and Recovery

- Do I have genuine time away from work or other major responsibilities?
- Can I switch off without feeling guilty?
- Am I getting enough sleep and downtime?

Relationships

- Have I been withdrawing from people?
- Do I have someone I can talk honestly with about how I'm doing?

Functioning

- Is my current level of exhaustion affecting my work, study, relationships or daily life?
- What has changed compared with how I normally feel?

Look for patterns and changes over time. If exhaustion, detachment or reduced functioning are persistent or worsening, it may be worth discussing what you're experiencing with a GP, psychologist, counsellor, workplace support service or another qualified professional.

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REFLECTION

What changes have you noticed in your energy, motivation, emotions or ability to switch off?

Energy

Motivation

Emotions

Ability to switch off

TAKEAWAY

Develop a clearer understanding of burnout and recognise your personal early-warning signs.

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MODULE THREE *ABOUT 45 TO 55 MIN*

03

Tips for Navigating Burnout

Practical Strategies for Moving Forward

Recognising burnout is only the first step. This module focuses on practical, manageable strategies that can help you respond to burnout and create healthier patterns.

Simple strategies for addressing burnout

- Identify and reduce unnecessary sources of stress wherever you possibly can
- Set realistic expectations and boundaries for yourself to prioritise wellbeing
- Prioritise rest and recovery time
- Create sustainable routines (never underestimate the value of sleep)
- Manage workloads and competing demands as much as possible, and discuss this with your boss if you are an employee who is struggling
- Reconnect with activities that support your wellbeing
- Communicate when you need help
- Build habits that can help reduce the risk of future burnout

Rather than trying to change everything at once, you'll be encouraged to identify small, achievable changes that fit your circumstances.



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Moving From Awareness to Action

Recognising burnout is important but knowing what to do next can be challenging.

This module focuses on practical strategies that can help you create space for recovery, establish healthier boundaries and make sustainable changes. There is no single solution to burnout. The aim is to identify changes that are realistic for your circumstances.

Start Small

When you are already exhausted, trying to completely transform your life can create another source of pressure. Instead, start with one or two manageable changes.

What is one thing I can stop doing?

What is one thing I can reduce?

What is one thing I can start doing?

What is one thing I can ask someone else to help with?

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Set Your Boundaries

Boundaries help define what you can reasonably give and what you need to protect.

Examples include

- Setting clearer working hours
- Taking breaks
- Not responding to non-urgent messages outside agreed hours
- Learning to say no or negotiate priorities
- Separating work and personal time
- Communicating realistic deadlines

ACTIVITY

Boundary Exercise

Complete each sentence:

One boundary I need to strengthen is...

The reason this matters to me is...

The conversation I need to have is with...

The first step I will take is...

FROM MY EXPERIENCE

"As a recovering people-pleaser, I understand how hard it is to say no to a social invitation, to extra shifts, or to swapping a roster date. But nothing should come at the cost of your own mental and physical energy."

DR SARAH WEBB

SEE ALSO Career Growth stream, Module 4: Creating Healthy Boundaries.

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Prioritising Your Energy

Not everything needs to be done immediately.

ACTIVITY Take your current to-do list and place each item into one of these categories.

Essential

Things that genuinely need your attention.

Important

Things that matter but may be scheduled.

Can Wait

Things that don't need immediate attention.

Can Delegate

Things someone else could help with.

Can Stop

Things that are consuming energy without providing enough value.

The goal isn't to do more.
The goal is to make your energy work for what matters most.

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Recovery Is Part of the Process

Recovery is not simply “doing nothing.”

It can include activities that restore physical, emotional, social or mental capacity. Consider:

- Sleep and regular rest
- Movement
- Time outdoors
- Meaningful relationships
- Hobbies
- Time away from work
- Quiet time
- Creativity
- Activities that provide enjoyment or purpose

ACTIVITY

Your Recovery

Something that helps me physically:

Something that helps me mentally:

Something that helps me emotionally:

Something that helps me connect with others:

Something I enjoy simply because I enjoy it:

SEE ALSO Career Growth stream, Module 4: Protecting Recovery and the End-of-Day Reset.

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Your Burnout Action Plan

My Top Three Priorities

1

2

3

One Thing I Will Stop

One Boundary I Will Establish

One Recovery Habit I Will Protect

One Person I Will Talk To

One Professional Support Option I Will Explore

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Action

Choose one small action to support your mental wellbeing this week.

Examples

- Contact someone you trust
- Book an appointment
- Take a proper break
- Re-establish a healthy routine
- Spend time away from work
- Talk openly about how you're feeling

I understand my wellbeing | I know my support options | I have identified one next step

Choose one action that you can realistically complete within the next seven days.

My action:

When I will do it:

What might get in the way:

How I will overcome that barrier:

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MODULE FOUR *ABOUT 30 TO 40 MIN*

04

Recognising When You Need Support

Building Your Support Network

Sometimes we adapt to stress gradually and don't realise how much it is affecting us.

Possible signs that you may benefit from additional support can include persistent changes in mood, sleep, motivation, concentration, relationships or ability to manage everyday responsibilities.

One sign on its own does not necessarily mean you are experiencing burnout or a mental health condition. The important thing is to pay attention to patterns, persistence and impact on your life.

In this module

- Your wellbeing check-in
- Building your support network
- Who can help?
- Preparing to ask for help
- Creating your referral plan

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ACTIVITY

Your Wellbeing Check-In

Circle (or click) a rating for each area from 1 to 5.

Area	01	02	03	04	05
Energy	○	○	○	○	○
Sleep	○	○	○	○	○
Mood	○	○	○	○	○
Motivation	○	○	○	○	○
Concentration	○	○	○	○	○
Relationships	○	○	○	○	○
Ability to switch off	○	○	○	○	○
Sense of enjoyment	○	○	○	○	○

Use this as a reflection tool rather than a diagnostic test.

NOTES

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ACTIVITY

Track Your Check-Ins Over Time

Come back to your check-in regularly. Record a rating from 1 to 5 for each area so you can see patterns and changes over time.

Area	Today	3 months	6 months	12 months
Date				
Energy				
Sleep				
Mood				
Motivation				
Concentration				
Relationships				
Ability to switch off				
Sense of enjoyment				

REFLECTION

What has changed since my last check-in?

What has helped the most?

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Building Your Support Network

Support doesn't have to begin when things become overwhelming.

Consider the different types of support available to you:

Personal support

- Family
- Friends
- Partners
- Trusted colleagues

Professional support

- General practitioners
- Psychologists
- Counsellors
- Mental health professionals
- Other appropriately qualified health professionals

Workplace support

- Managers
- Human resources
- Employee assistance programs
- Workplace wellbeing services

ACTIVITY

Your Support Map

Someone I can talk to:

Someone who can help me practically:

A professional I could contact:

A workplace resource I can access:

A wellbeing activity that helps me:

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Who Can Help?

Different professionals can provide different forms of support.

General Practitioner

A GP can discuss your concerns, assess your overall health and help determine what support may be appropriate.

Psychologist

Psychologists can provide assessment and psychological interventions for a range of mental health and wellbeing concerns.

Counsellor

Counselling can provide a confidential environment to explore personal, emotional and situational challenges.

Mental Health Services

Depending on your circumstances and location, community or specialist mental health services may also be available.

Workplace Support

Your organisation may provide services such as an Employee Assistance Program, workplace counselling or other wellbeing resources.

Preparing to Ask for Help

You don't need to have all the answers before contacting someone.

It can help to write down:

- What you've been experiencing
- How long you've noticed it
- What seems to make things better or worse
- How it is affecting your everyday life
- Any changes you've noticed in sleep, mood, energy or behaviour
- What support you're hoping to receive

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CONVERSATION STARTER

You can begin with something as simple as:

"I've noticed that I haven't been feeling like myself recently, and it's starting to affect my wellbeing. I'd like to talk to someone about what I'm experiencing and what support might be available."

Create Your Referral Plan

My Preferred Professional

How I Will Contact Them

When I Will Contact Them

Someone Who Can Support Me Through the Process

Questions I Want to Ask

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Key Elements at a Glance

A summary of each module to look back on.

Understand 01

- Wellbeing is more than the absence of illness
- Know what is normal for you and notice changes
- Build your support network before crisis point

Recognise 02

- Burnout builds gradually: high demands, reduced recovery
- Signs can be physical, emotional, cognitive and behavioural
- Everyday stress and burnout are not the same
- Know your personal early warning signs

Respond 03

- Start small: stop, reduce, start, ask for help
- Strengthen one boundary at a time
- Sort tasks from Essential to Can Stop
- Recovery is part of the process

Connect 04

- Watch for patterns, persistence and impact
- Draw on personal, professional and workplace support
- GPs, psychologists, counsellors and EAPs can help
- Prepare what to say and make a referral plan

Learn · Reflect · Act · Connect

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FINAL SECTION

Your Personal Wellbeing Plan

You've now explored four important areas.

UNDERSTAND

Understand mental health and wellbeing.

RECOGNISE

Recognise your own signs and potential contributors to burnout.

RESPOND

Develop practical strategies for managing demands and protecting recovery.

CONNECT

Know when and where to seek additional support.

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My Wellbeing Plan

My Personal Warning Signs

My Personal Recovery Strategies

My Boundaries

My Support Network

My Professional Support Option

My Next Step

My Commitment

One thing I will do differently from today is:

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Glossary

What the mental health and support terms in this stream mean.

Burnout
A state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion linked to prolonged stress, especially when recovery time, resources or control are lacking.

Mental wellbeing
How well you manage everyday challenges, connect with others, experience emotions and keep a sense of purpose. It is more than the absence of mental illness.

Stressor
Anything that causes stress, such as workload, conflict or financial pressure.

Cognitive
To do with thinking, such as concentration, memory and decision-making.

Disengagement
Pulling back emotionally from work or people, often feeling detached or cynical.

Cynicism
A negative, distrustful attitude towards work, colleagues or clients that can develop with burnout.

Emotional exhaustion
Feeling emotionally drained, with little left to give at work or at home.

Recovery
Activities and time that restore your physical, emotional, social or mental energy.

Boundary
A limit you set to protect your time, energy and wellbeing, such as not answering non-urgent messages after hours.

Perfectionism
Holding yourself to unrealistically high standards, which can increase stress and self-criticism.

GP (General Practitioner)
Your local doctor. A good first contact for health concerns, including mental health.

Mental Health Treatment Plan
A plan made with your GP that gives access to Medicare-subsidised sessions with a psychologist or other mental health professional.

Medicare
Australia's public health insurance scheme, which subsidises many health services.

Psychologist
A registered health professional who assesses and treats mental health and wellbeing concerns using evidence-based therapies.

Counsellor
A professional who provides a confidential space to talk through personal, emotional or situational challenges.

EAP (Employee Assistance Program)
A free, confidential counselling service many employers offer to staff and their families.

Crisis counselling
Immediate support for someone who is in distress or feels unsafe.

AVA
The Australian Veterinary Association, the professional body for vets in Australia.

THRIVE
The AVA's wellbeing initiative, offering programs and training for veterinary teams.

Referral
Being directed by one professional, such as your GP, to another for specialised support.

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You've Completed the Stream

Congratulations!

Preventing burnout doesn't mean getting the balance right every day. It means noticing when something isn't working, making changes you can keep up, and reaching out for support when you need it.

Keep your personal wellbeing plan somewhere accessible and return to it regularly. Your needs can change. Your plan can change too.

If you're in crisis or immediate danger, call 000. For 24/7 support, call Lifeline on **13 11 14**. More services are listed on the Where to Get Help page.

Learn. Reflect. Act. Connect.

Recommended Reading

- *The Third Space* by Dr Adam Fraser

  Using the transition between work and home to reset, so you arrive at home in the right frame of mind.

- *Letting Go* by David R. Hawkins

  A simple approach to releasing built-up stress and difficult emotions.

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A Guide for Veterinary Professionals

For more support and resources such as podcasts and further education visit

www.thevetsonfire.net