Mental illness is common and costly in workplaces, with the majority of full-time workers not seeking help. One way that the impact of common mental illnesses can be reduced is through facilitating effective early intervention within the workplace. Studies have found that improving mental health literacy (MHL), ‘the knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders which aid their recognition, management or prevention,’ can encourage early help-seeking. Studies indicate gaps in MHL and high stigma towards employees with mental health problems. However, few workplace MHL programs have been evaluated to establish effectiveness.

One well-evaluated MHL program is Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), which aims to improve ‘the help provided to a person developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis’. Studies demonstrate MHFA leads to improved MHL and reduced stigma in participants, sustained six months later. Though MHFA has been evaluated in several workplace settings where the broad focus was on staff developing skills to help any adult, it is not strictly a workplace intervention. The founders initially designed MHFA for the community as a complement to physical first aid training for the public. Nevertheless, MHFA has been identified as the only international and evidence-based workplace anti-stigma initiative. This research aims to adapt the MHFA program to make a version that is tailored to dealing with common mental illnesses in the workplace setting. The proposed program of research will involve three studies: 1) a survey exploring MHFA Instructors’ experiences delivering the existing MHFA course to workplaces; 2) a Delphi consensus study to develop mental health first aid guidelines for workplaces; 3) an uncontrolled trial to pilot a tailored MHFA course for workplaces.

Nataly Bovopoulos is currently employed as the Deputy CEO of Mental Health First Aid Australia, a national not-for-profit charity. She has previous experience in mental health promotion roles, as well as several years experience coordinating research projects with children, adolescents and families experiencing anxiety and mood disorders. Nataly has a Masters of International Public Health and a Bachelor of Liberal Studies with honours in Psychology, both from the University of Sydney.