

Managing Psychosocial Hazards and Risks

A guide for small business in the Health Care and Social Assistance sector



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Returnto
WorkSA



Government
of South Australia

What is a psychosocial hazard and risk?

A psychosocial hazard is anything in the workplace that has the potential to cause psychological harm (e.g. harm to someone's mental health).

The most common psychosocial hazards experienced in the Health Care and Social Assistance sector are work-related violence and aggression, workplace bullying and harassment, and high job demands.

Despite these being the most common hazards within your workplace, there are many other psychosocial hazards that can also be present and require focus. It is important to consider which psychosocial hazards are present within your workplace and how they may combine to increase the risk of harm.

These resources will provide information on the range of psychosocial hazards that may exist within workplaces and the different ways workers may talk about these in the workplace.

Psychosocial hazards can create harm through a worker's experience of a work-related stress response.

While a certain amount of stress can improve performance and motivation, when the stress is frequent, prolonged or severe, because of exposure to psychosocial hazards, it can have negative effects on health and safety.

Negative effects can be psychological (e.g., anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder) as well as physical such as musculoskeletal injuries, chronic disease or fatigue related injuries.

By addressing psychosocial hazards and risks, workplaces can create safe, supportive and thriving workplaces.

**Managing
psychosocial
hazards at
work**



**What
psychosocial
hazards
sound like**



Why it's important to address psychosocial hazards and risks in Health Care and Social Assistance

It's a legislative requirement

In South Australia, the work health and safety psychosocial regulations came into effect on 25 December 2023.

The changes to the regulations under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2012* (SA) help provide better guidance to employers and workers in preventing psychological harm.

The new laws mean that workplaces have legal obligations to address psychosocial hazards and risks in the workplace (as far as is reasonably practicable) and take a proactive approach in meeting these obligations.

Taking action assists in preventing psychological and physical injuries

Psychological injuries significantly impact the Health Care and Social Assistance sector. Data shows psychological injury claims have nearly doubled in the last six years.¹

These claims are more costly with the median compensation paid for psychological injury claims three times higher than for other injuries². On average, work related psychological injuries have longer recovery times, higher costs and require more time away from work.³ Prevention is better than cure.



Mentally Healthy Workplaces



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It makes good business sense

It makes good business sense for a workplace to address psychosocial hazards and risks as it is a key component to creating a mentally healthy workplace.

Research has shown there can be a significant return on investment by addressing psychosocial hazards and risks within the workplace with workers less likely to be absent and more likely to be productive and effective in their roles.^{4&5}

Additionally, with the Health Care and Social Assistance workforce often engaging with client facing services, having a workforce that feels safe and supported assists in their ability to effectively deliver these services and provide better client care.

Significant benefits are also seen via worker attraction and retention. Workers are placing higher importance on their mental health and how the workplace impacts their wellbeing. An organisation that actively engages in creating a mentally healthy workplace and a culture of care, can become an employer of choice and seen as an attractive place to work.

1. SafeWork Australia. (2024). "Health Care and Social Assistance Health and Fatality Interactive Data."

2. SafeWork Australia. (2024). "New report on Psychological Health in Australian Workplaces."

3. SafeWork Australia. (2024). "New report on Psychological Health in Australian Workplaces."

4. TNS & Beyond Blue. (2014). State of Workplace Mental Health in Australia.

5. Committee for Economic Development of Australia. (2022). Mental Health and the Workplace. How Can Employers Improve Productivity Through Wellbeing?"



Are psychosocial hazards present within your organisation?

It's important to identify if psychosocial hazards and risks are present within your workplace. This self-assessment tool will assist in this process and identify whether deeper investigation is needed.



If you tick **Yes** to one or more of these questions your workers are likely exposed to workplace psychosocial hazards and more investigation is needed.



Undertake a more in-depth audit of your workplace by using **SafeWork SA's Risk Assessment Tool**.



Scan code or
[click here](#)

SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

- ☐ I am unsure of what a psychosocial hazard can look and sound like.
- ☐ I have/had workers on leave for work-related physical or psychological injuries.
- ☐ I do not have ways for workers to report psychosocial hazards and risks.
- ☐ I have knowledge of, or it has been reported, that my workers have been exposed to harmful behaviours such as workplace violence and aggression or workplace bullying.
- ☐ There are trends or common themes in complaints or workplace grievances.
- ☐ My workers general work behaviours seem different, and I think they are under pressure.
- ☐ My workers have expressed they are feeling stressed.
- ☐ I can't retain or attract workers.

How to address psychosocial hazards in Health Care and Social Assistance

Much like managing physical hazards and risks, engaging with the four-step risk management process is the most effective way to address psychosocial hazards and risks within the workplace.

Risk Management Approach



How to
manage
psychosocial
hazards



How is
**Reasonably
Practicable**
defined?



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Step 1

Identify the hazards

Look for those things in the workplace that have the potential to cause psychological harm such as exposure to workplace violence and aggression or excessive job demands. Consultation with workers is an important part of this process with many psychosocial hazards not easily identifiable and often subjective to each individual worker or team.

Step 2

Assess the risks

Assess the likelihood and consequences that may result from exposure to the identified psychosocial hazards or risks.

Step 3

Control the risks

After determining which factor(s) associated with work-related stress pose risk to worker health and safety, control measures should be selected and implemented to eliminate or minimise risks, so far as is reasonably practicable. Again, consultation with workers is important when designing control measures with many workers having effective strategies or ideas to mitigate presenting risks.

Step 4

Review the control measures

Review the effectiveness of the control measures that have been implemented to ensure they are working as planned.

Consultation

Consultation with workers is a key aspect of the risk management approach to address psychosocial hazards in the workplace, as well as a requirement under the legislation.

For more information on **Effective Consultation** scan the QR code or [click here](#)



Leadership Commitment

It is essential to have **ongoing leadership commitment** to address psychosocial hazards and risks in your workplace.

For example, managers communicating how psychosocial hazards are being addressed in the workplace, consulting with workers about these issues and leaders taking action to eliminate or minimise risks are all effective ways of demonstrating ongoing leadership commitment.

1:1 Consultation Tool for Leaders

Conversation guide around psychosocial hazards and risks

Consultation with workers must be undertaken during the risk management approach. A safe workplace is more easily achieved when everyone talks openly about work health and safety issues and concerns, helps to identify hazards and risks, and works together to find solutions.

While the data suggests work-related violence and aggression, workplace bullying and harassment, and high job demands are the most common psychosocial hazards and risks experienced within the health care and social assistance sector, it's important to identify and understand all hazards that may be occurring within your specific organisation.

Consulting with workers is one of the best ways to understand what psychosocial hazards and risks are being experienced and how these may be addressed.

Sometimes having these conversations can be challenging for both leaders and workers. To assist with this, a Consultation Tool for one-on-one conversations has been developed to provide guidance.

The Consultation Tool can assist in obtaining good quality information about psychosocial hazards and risks, whilst ensuring those involved feel safe, supported and confident in this process.

Remember – you don't need to be an expert to talk with workers about mental health and psychosocial hazards and risks.



1:1 Consultation Tool for Leaders

Conversation guide around psychosocial hazards and risks

Prior to engaging in conversation

- 1 Make sure you are aware and up to date on any existing reviews of psychosocial hazards and risks within the workplace (previous conversations, reporting of incidents).
- 2 Ensure that you understand the potential psychosocial hazards and risks that may be most relevant to your organisation (e.g., are there regular reports of exposure to workplace violence).
- 3 Approach the conversation informed but with an open mind regarding what psychosocial hazards and risks may be present.
- 4 Inform the worker that psychosocial hazards and risks will be the topic of discussion to allow them to be prepared. This may include providing details on what psychosocial hazards and risks are or describing it to them in simple ways such as wanting to discuss the things at work that may impact their health and wellbeing to provide a better place to work.
- 5 Ensure the conversation is held in a private and confidential environment.
- 6 Allow extra time for the conversation to ensure that workers can provide appropriate information.
- 7 Be prepared to listen and acknowledge challenges, as well as understand that solutions may not be apparent immediately.
- 8 Be aware of mental health supports available in case issues are raised that indicate support is needed.

During the conversation

- 1 Ask open ended questions such as “what is going well or not so well at work” or “what are the biggest challenges/stressors you are facing regarding your work?”
- 2 Be supportive and acknowledge the challenges being experienced.

Understand people may talk differently about psychosocial hazards and risks and how they are impacting them. (The different ways in which people may talk about impacts of psychosocial hazards and risks can be found on page 2 of this guide - “What psychosocial hazards sound like” QR code).
- 3 Allow for workers to offer solutions to address the challenges faced.
- 4 Summarise the psychosocial hazards and risks highlighted, as well as what areas that they feel need to be addressed first.
- 5 Summarise solutions provided by workers on ways to address presenting psychosocial hazards and risks.
- 6 Summarise the next steps in the process of addressing these challenges (e.g., detail ways in which the organisation will use the information provided to address issues).
- 7 If things raised during the conversation indicate the person needs mental health support, inform them of supports available (page 11). If this is the case, check in on them the next day, or as soon as practicable, to see how they are.

After the conversation

- 1 Allow further information to be provided outside of the meeting times to ensure workers haven’t missed anything.
- 2 Use the information provided alongside other information gathered to identify the major areas that require focus.
- 3 Develop a plan of how the presenting issues from workers will be addressed and responded to, and provide to workers to allow for further feedback.
- 4 Be prepared to clarify the information provided to ensure you are fully understanding the challenges experienced, as well as potential solutions.
- 5 Regularly communicate with workers on how issues within the workplace are being addressed. Monitor and review solutions to ensure they are effective.



Download a
copy of the
Conversation
Guide



Mental Health Resources

Having conversations about workplace stressors/challenges may impact workers in different ways.

It may lead to the identification that someone needs mental health support and assistance. It's always important in these situations to be able to provide someone with information and guidance on where they can access help.

The following services are available in our community that provide mental health support:

Lifeline: www.lifeline.org.au Call 13 11 14 or Text 0477 13 11 14

Suicide Call Back Service: www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au Call 1300 659 467

Mental Health Triage Service: Call 13 14 65

Beyond Blue: www.beyondblue.org.au Call 1300 22 46 36

13 YARN: www.13yarn.org.au Call 13 92 76 (Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander crisis support line).

Medicare Mental Health: www.medicarementalhealth.gov.au Call 1800 595 212

New Access for Small Business Owners www.beyondblue.org.au Call 1300 945 301
(For business owners with 20 or less workers)

General practitioner (GP) A GP can be a good starting point for someone seeking professional help.

If you perceive someone is at immediate risk of harm to themselves or others call 000



Additional Resources



Free self-paced learning modules

Managing Psychosocial Hazards and Risks in the Workplace



Enrol



60 minutes



Ideal for Leaders

[Register via QR code or click here](#)

Mentally Healthy Workplaces



Enrol



90 minutes



Ideal for Leaders

[Register via QR code or click here](#)

Free advice and support

For all your Mentally Healthy Workplaces and Wellbeing queries:

Mentally Healthy Workplaces Service

(08) 8233 2310 | mentallyhealthy@rtwsa.com

For all your return to work and injury management queries:

Employer Education Team

(08) 8238 5958 | coordinators@rtwsa.com



Guidance materials

Scan the QR code
or click title

[Managing Workplace Psychological Injury Guide](#)

A resource to support workplaces to improve practice in the areas of prevention, early intervention and return to work management of psychological injuries.



[Psychological Health for Small Business Guide](#)

This guide provides practical guidance to small businesses on how to manage psychosocial hazards at work.



[Guide for Preventing Workplace Violence and Aggression](#)

This guide provides information on how to manage the risk of violence and aggression in the workplace, including gendered violence.



[Guide for Preventing and Responding to Workplace Bullying](#)

This guide provides information on how to manage the risks of workplace bullying under the WHS laws.

