

Psychosocial Hazards

Every state and territory in Australia, and New Zealand, now requires workplaces to identify and manage psychosocial hazards. These obligations sit within work health and safety legislation and apply to all workers, whether they are full-time, part-time, casual or contractors.

PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARD DEFINITION

A psychosocial hazard is any characteristic of work - including how work is designed, managed and organised - that has the potential to cause psychological or physical harm to a worker. This includes aspects of the work environment, systems workers operate within, and how people interact with each other at work.

Psychosocial hazards can affect anyone, in any industry. Unlike physical hazards, they are often invisible but can cause serious, long-lasting harm including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, burnout and physical illness. On average, psychological injuries result in longer recovery times and greater costs than physical injuries.

LEGISLATION AND CODES OF PRACTICE - BY JURISDICTION

Each Australian state and territory - plus New Zealand - has specific legislation and a Code of Practice that governs psychosocial hazards.

Jurisdiction	Regulator	Primary Legislation	Code of Practice
Western Australia	WorkSafe WA	Work Health and Safety Act 2020	Psychosocial Hazards in the Workplace - Code of Practice
New South Wales	SafeWork NSW	Work Health and Safety Act 2011	Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work - Code of Practice
Victoria	WorkSafe Victoria	Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004	Compliance Code: Psychological Health
Queensland	WHS Queensland	Work Health and Safety Act 2011	Managing the Risk of Psychosocial Hazards at Work - Code of Practice
South Australia	SafeWork SA	Work Health and Safety Act 2012	Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work - Code of Practice
Tasmania	WorkSafe Tasmania	Work Health and Safety Act 2012	Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work - Code of Practice
ACT	WorkSafe ACT	Work Health and Safety Act 2011	Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work - Code of Practice



Jurisdiction	Regulator	Primary Legislation	Code of Practice
Northern Territory	NT WorkSafe	Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011	Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work - Code of Practice (May 2024)
New Zealand	WorkSafe NZ	Health and Safety at Work Act 2015	Managing Psychosocial Risks at Work - WorkSafe NZ Guide

THE MOST COMMON PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS

The hazards below are identified across multiple Australian and New Zealand codes of practice. They have been organised into six categories to align with workplace training and compliance programs. Employers must identify and manage hazards across all six categories.

1. Manager's Responsibility

- Poor leadership practices that negatively influence workplace culture
- Inadequate support - constructive feedback, assistance and/or resources
- Lack of role clarity
- Low recognition and reward
- Unfairness and inconsistency in the way decisions are made and people are treated

2. Organisational Behaviour

- Poor management practices and procedures related to managing workplace behaviours
- Low levels of control and autonomy
- Poor organisational change management

3. Social Factors

- Inappropriate / unlawful behaviours
- Family and domestic violence

4. Work Demands & Impact

- Fatigue
- Burnout
- Work demands



5. Environment

- Adverse environmental conditions
- Remote work
- Isolated work
- Insecure work

6. Trauma

- Traumatic events
- Secondary trauma
- Vicarious trauma

WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE THINKS THEY ARE BEING HARMED BY A PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARD AT WORK

If a person thinks they are being harmed by a psychosocial hazard at work, the first thing they can do is find out if their organisation has a policy or procedure about psychosocial hazards or workplace health and safety. If it does, they can use this to have a conversation with their manager, HR, or safety representative. Tell them what has been happening and why they think this is causing harm. It is useful to work out what they want the manager or HR to do about the issue and to ask for it to be done.

Possible things someone could ask their manager to do include reviewing workloads, clarifying role expectations, improving how change is communicated, or addressing specific workplace behaviours. Sometimes managers and colleagues may not be aware that something is causing harm, so giving them the opportunity to understand and respond is an important first step.

If the issue is serious - because it has been ongoing, involves someone in authority, or the risk to health and safety is significant - then a formal complaint or report may be appropriate. The person should check whether their organisation has a formal complaint or incident management process. A formal report is usually in writing and should explain what has been happening, who is involved, and when and where it occurred. It is important to stick to the facts and avoid emotional language when making a formal report.

Once a formal report is made, the organisation should assess the risk and take appropriate action. This may include changes to how work is designed or managed, mediation, or a formal investigation depending on the nature of the hazard.

If a person has raised a concern and it has not been managed to their satisfaction, they can contact WorkSafe in their state or territory. WorkSafe will not normally get involved unless the person has attempted to resolve it internally and it has not been successful. WorkSafe does not represent the individual but conducts an investigation to assess if there is an unsafe work practice and then makes recommendations as to what the organisation must do.



FOR MORE INFORMATION — CONTACT YOUR STATE OR TERRITORY REGULATOR

If you have concerns about psychosocial hazards in your workplace, or need guidance on your obligations, contact the relevant regulator for your jurisdiction. All regulators offer free information and advice services.

State / Territory	Regulator	Phone	Email / Website
Western Australia	WorkSafe WA	1300 307 877	wscallcentre@lgirs.wa.gov.au
New South Wales	SafeWork NSW	13 10 50	Submit an online enquiry
Victoria	WorkSafe Victoria	1800 136 089	Submit an online enquiry
Queensland	WHS Queensland	1300 362 128	Submit an online enquiry
South Australia	SafeWork SA	1300 365 255	Submit an online enquiry
Tasmania	WorkSafe Tasmania	1300 366 322	wst.info@justice.tas.gov.au
ACT	WorkSafe ACT	13 22 81	worksafe@worksafe.act.gov.au
Northern Territory	NT WorkSafe	1800 019 115	Submit an online enquiry
New Zealand	WorkSafe NZ	0800 030 040 (NZ)	Submit an online enquiry

EEO Specialists do not represent individual people making complaints, but we hope this information has been useful in helping work out what to do.

We do provide a comprehensive training service for organisations, to educate their staff about psychosocial hazards and their obligations, and manager training on how to identify, prevent and respond to psychosocial risks.

*If you would like to know more, please call **Franca Sala Tenna** on **0405 134 187** or email **franca@equalopportunitytraining.com.au***

