

New national guidance on work-related psychological health and safety

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**New guidance:
work-related
psychological
health and safety**

Safe Work Australia has published new national guidance to help employers and workers understand and meet their duties concerning psychological health and safety in the workplace.

With a focus on preventative action, the guidance was described by Dr Peta Miller, Special Adviser for Safe Work Australia, as “essential reading for anyone who wants to build a healthy and safe workplace.”

We were privileged to have [Dr Miller](#) introduce the guidance at our 2018 Annual National Conference in May.

“Poor psychological safety costs Australian organisations \$6 billion per annum in lost productivity. This is primarily because psychological injuries require three times more time off work than other injuries”, she

said.

“Additionally, workplaces with poor psychological working conditions accrue 43 per cent more sick days per month.”

Dr Miller explained that work-related psychological injury can be caused by excessive time pressures, unreasonable deadlines and poorly managed organisational change.

The detailed guidance describes a systematic and practical approach to managing work-related psychological health and safety across three key areas: preventing harm, intervening early and supporting recovery.

Preventing harm

The first step in preventing harm is to identify risks. Common psychosocial hazards include: high or low job demands, low job control, poor support, poor workplace relationships, workplace violence, poor environmental conditions, low recognition and reward, poor organisational justice and remote or isolated work.

You may need to assess risks, considering what could happen if someone was exposed to the hazard and the likelihood of that happening.

Then you can work to eliminate or minimise risks. The guidance provides you with a comprehensive list of examples on how to do this, which includes consultation with workers, changes to the work environment or ensuring you have clear expectations around workplace bullying.

Intervene early

The earlier you identify a worker is experiencing stress, the better. Workers are more likely to report workplace stress if they can see you are a supportive, inclusive workplace that will maintain confidentiality. But it's

still very common for people not to report stress to their employer, so it's important to look out for reports of low morale, unexplained sick leave or reduced productivity.

You can then move to put appropriate supports in place. Depending on the circumstances, this could involve counselling, training or offering flexible and varied working arrangements.

Support recovery

Supporting recovery and return to work begins with strong management commitment and good planning to support the injured worker throughout the process. This should include individualised Recover At Work, Return To Work and Employee Assistance Program plans.

Many of the principles and practices for supporting recovery from work-related psychological illness are similar to those required for supporting recovery from physical injury. A detailed description of your legal obligations is provided.

Read the complete guide: [*Work-related psychological health and safety: A systematic approach to meeting your duties.*](#)