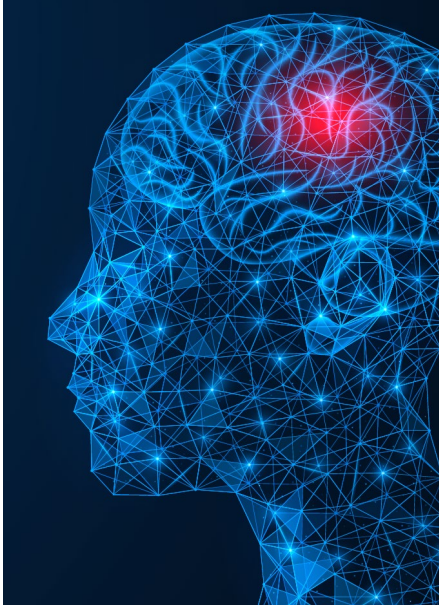


# Psychosocial Hazards



## Quick guide

- Psychosocial hazards are aspects of work, both inherent in the role as well as within the work environment, which have the potential to cause psychological or physical harm.
- Like other physical health and safety hazards, psychosocial hazards must be identified and managed.
- Employers have a duty of care, as far as reasonably practicable, to ensure not only the physical health, but also the psychological health and welfare of their workers and other persons including contractors.

## What are psychosocial hazards?

Psychosocial hazard is the term used to describe aspects of the work environment and the way that work is organised, which are associated with psychological health and welfare and / or physical injury or illness.

Psychosocial hazards at work may arise from:

- The design or management of work
- The working environment
- Workplace interactions or behaviours.

## How do psychosocial hazards cause harm?

Psychosocial hazards are closely associated with work-related stress.

Work-related stress is a response which you may experience when presented with work demands and pressures which exceed or exhaust your ability or resources to cope.

## Types of psychosocial hazards

There are many types of psychosocial hazards. Some common hazards are listed in the table below.

### Low job control

Little control over aspects of work, including how or when a job is done.

### High and low job demands

Sustained high or low physical, mental or emotional effort required to complete a job.

### Poor support

Inadequate support including emotional and physical support but also in the form of tools and resources.

### Poor organisation change management

Lack of consultation and communication with key stakeholders and employees about major changes

### Poor organisational justice

Inconsistent application of policies and procedures leading to unfairness and bias.

### Low recognition and reward

Lack of positive feedback or opportunity for your skill development.

### Low role clarity

Uncertainty about or frequent changes to tasks and work standards.

### Poor workplace relationships

Includes bullying, aggression, harassment, sexual harassment and gendered violence or discrimination.

### Poor environmental conditions

Exposure to poor-quality or hazardous working environments.

### Remote and isolated work

Work locations where access to resources and communications are difficult and travel times may be lengthy.

### Violent or traumatic events

Exposure to a violent or traumatic event at work.

## Workplace Health and Safety frameworks

Similar to other physical health and safety hazards, psychological hazards are dealt with under existing workplace health and safety frameworks.

Safe Work Australia is the Australian government statutory agency responsible for developing national work health and safety policy.

Each state and territory is responsible for its own Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) laws and has a regulator to enforce them. The states and territories are not obliged to adopt the Safe Work Australia policy but can use it as guidance.

The overall framework for each state and territory includes the following.

- **Act** – outlines the employers' broad responsibilities.
- **Regulations** – set out specific requirements for particular hazards and risks, such as noise, machinery and manual handling.
- **Codes of practice** – provide practical information on how the employer can meet the requirements in the Acts and Regulations.
- **Regulating agency** – administers WHS laws, inspects workplaces, provides advice and enforces the laws.

## Guidance for practices

Many state and territory WHS regulations include obligations about psychosocial risks. Some have also introduced a code of practice to assist businesses to manage these risks.

Safe Work Australia has published a model code of practice that defines psychosocial hazards and risks, provides guidance on managing psychosocial risks and identifies control measures. See [Psychosocial hazards | Safe Work Australia](#)

## What does this mean?

Managing psychosocial hazards as a work health and safety issue can be done, using a risk assessment process.

An effective risk assessment involves your entire team which will help ensure all risks are identified and solutions are consultative. In addition to this, including your entire team in the process will help reduce stress they may experience when you seek to implement strategies to reduce or eliminate psychosocial hazards.

## Identifying psychosocial hazards

The first step in the risk management process is to identify psychosocial hazards. This involves identifying the aspects of work and situations that could potentially harm workers or others at the workplace and why they may be occurring.

## Assessing the associated risks

Once the psychosocial hazards have been identified the next step is to assess the risks these psychosocial hazards create.

## Controlling the risk

The third step involves controlling the identified psychosocial hazards and their associated risks. Ideally you should aim to eliminate risks to health and safety where reasonably practicable. If this is not possible, you must minimise risks or their impacts so far as is reasonably practicable.

## Reviewing the control measures

The final step in managing psychosocial hazards is to review the effectiveness of the implemented control measures to ensure they are working as planned. If not, review the control measures, and if appropriate, modify or replace them.



Figure 1 Diagram of the risk management process adapted from Safe Work Australia, 2022.

Risk assessment is not a one-off event. Workplace health and safety issues change over time and it is important to continually monitor and review control measures through a regular risk assessment process.

## What does this mean for employers, workers and contractors?

### Employers

As an employer, you now have a duty of care to ensure not only the physical health, but also the psychological health and welfare of your workers and other persons including contractors, as far as reasonably practicable.

### Workers and contractors

As a worker or contractor, you now have a duty to not only take reasonable care for your own physical and mental health and safety, but to also make sure your behaviour and actions do not adversely affect the physical and physiological health and safety of others.

## Where can I find more information?

Workplace health and safety laws vary between state and territory jurisdictions. For further jurisdiction specific information contact your state or territory regulator.

## Additional resources

### Australian Government - Safe Work Australia

- Psychosocial hazard definitions: [What psychosocial hazards sound like](#)
- Psychosocial hazards Model Code of Practice: [Model Code of Practice: Managing psychosocial hazards at work](#)

### NSW Government - Safe Work NSW

- Psychosocial hazards Model Code of Practice: [Code of Practice](#)

### Victorian Government - Worksafe

- Victorian proposed regulatory change: [Occupational Health and Safety Amendment](#)
- Psychosocial hazard information: [Psychosocial hazards contributing to work-related stress](#)

### Queensland Government - WorkSafe

- Psychosocial hazard information: [Psychosocial hazards and factors](#)

### South Australian Government - SafeWork

- Psychosocial hazard information: [Psychological hazards & work-related stress](#)

### Western Australian Government - WorkSafe

- Psychosocial hazards Model Code of Practice: [Code of Practice](#)

### Australian Capital Territory - WorkSafe ACT

- Psychosocial hazard information: [Managing work-related psychosocial hazards](#)

For more information or immediate medico-legal advice, call us on **1800 128 268**, 24/7 in emergencies. [avant.org.au/mlas](http://avant.org.au/mlas)



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