

# WORKING WITH *YOU*

ISSUE 47 | WINTER EDITION

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Australian Government

Comcare

PUTTING YOU *FIRST*

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Comcare

GPO Box 9905, Canberra ACT 2601

Phone 1300 366 979

Website [www.comcare.gov.au](http://www.comcare.gov.au)

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## Welcome to the winter edition of *Working with You.*

This winter it was my privilege to gain some insight into just how tough it is for homeless people by participating in the St Vincent de Paul CEO Sleepout in Melbourne.



Along with 116 other leaders, I slept rough at Etihad stadium equipped only with a sleeping bag, pillow and cardboard. Across the country some 684 business and community leaders participated, raising over \$2.86 million.

I can tell you the floor was hard and the night was long and cold—but it was an invaluable insight into just how tough life must be for those Australians who lose touch with a sustaining community and become socially excluded.

At Comcare, we are striving to remember that promoting social inclusion is one of our major priorities.

By keeping workers healthy and safe at work—and by helping injured workers get back to work and independence as quickly as possible—we are helping workers stay part of a supportive and inclusive community.

Staying connected is a theme that runs through this month's edition. You will find an update on how we're connecting with employees and employers in preparation for new harmonised work health and safety laws that come into effect on 1 January 2012.

We meet Professor Sir Mansel Aylward CB, one of the world's leading experts in health, illness and recovery. His message is that getting back to work quickly is one of the best things a worker can do to stay connected and recover from injury.

We speak with Kate Cleary from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, winner of a Comcare scholarship, who shares with us some insight about her experience in supporting injured workers.

Underlining Comcare's support for collaboration, we report on a successful new incident notification system at the Australian Federal Police and a recent Top End Forum in Broome in which Comcare worked with federal employers to share ideas for helping workers to become healthier and safer at work.

A good chance to connect with Comcare is our eighth National Conference being held from 22 to 24 September in Canberra. You can view the program and register online. I look forward to meeting many of you there.

Paul O'Connor  
CEO



## The Top End OHS Forum—working together to share ideas and lessons

The OHS forum took place during May 2010 in Broome, Western Australia. Comcare arranged the forum for agencies operating in the tropical north of Australia.

The purpose was to share information and lessons about the particular risks associated with operating in this region.

Comcare staff together with representatives from the Australian Defence Force (ADF)—Army, the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and the Kimberley Population Health Unit delivered presentations and discussed a range of topics. Topics included preparing employees for remote working, family support networks, the challenges of working in remote health clinics and heat injury management.

The focus of the forum was to address OHS issues at a practical and operational level. We wanted to showcase best practice and innovative solutions to top end OHS issues by bringing together agencies regulated by Comcare to collaborate on their solutions.

Lieutenant Colonel Roger Holmes from the Army provided a comprehensive presentation detailing the ADF's heat injury management program. He openly and honestly addressed the tragic event in which a Trooper died from heat-related injuries during an exercise in the Northern Territory in 2004. He discussed the lessons the ADF learned from this incident. A case study surrounding the

events gave everyone the chance to understand the issues involved and map out potential solutions. The honest and sincere look into the circumstances of the incident set the stage for robust and open discussions.

The Top End Forum was an example of Comcare working with the jurisdiction to share ideas for achieving better safety outcomes for workers.

"The forum was well attended and provided for the first time an opportunity to examine OHS issues specific to the Top End," said Carl Asker (SA/NT Regional Director). "Participants engaged with Comcare regional staff face-to-face and the unanimous sentiment was that the forum addressed relevant OHS issues at an operational level and should be an annual event".

Comcare is always looking for opportunities to hear the stories from your organisation's journey. Contact us via email ([OHS.Help@comcare.gov.au](mailto:OHS.Help@comcare.gov.au)) or use our online form found on the Comcare website ([www.comcare.gov.au](http://www.comcare.gov.au)).



# Workplace health and safety legislation harmonisation

In July 2008 the Council of Australia Governments (COAG) formally committed to the harmonisation of occupational health and safety (OHS) legislation.

COAG signed an Intergovernmental Agreement for Regulatory and Operational Reform in OHS (IGA). The IGA requires the Commonwealth and each state and territory to pass their own laws that mirror model work health and safety (WHS) laws and adopt them by December 2011. Safe Work Australia is responsible for developing the model WHS laws.

## WHAT HAS BEEN DONE SO FAR?

On 11 December 2009, the Workplace Relations Ministers' Council (WRMC) endorsed the Model WHS Act. The model WHS Act requires protection of the health and safety of any person from exposure to hazards and risks that arise from the performance of work, anything that is provided for or used in the performance of work, and the workplace. The WHS Act extends the scope and coverage of work health and safety laws to reflect current work arrangements that go beyond the traditional employment relationship.

## KEY PROVISIONS OF THE MODEL WHS ACT

Duties of persons conducting a business or undertaking, officers, worker and others including:

- > consultation duties
- > right to cease or refuse unsafe work
- > anti-discrimination provisions
- > penalties for breaches of duty of care
- > incident notifications
- > enforcement and compliance
- > union right of entry.

A copy of the model WHS Act endorsed by WRMC can be found on the Safe Work Australia website: [www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au](http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au)

## WHAT'S NEXT?


Safe Work Australia and all jurisdictions are currently developing model WHS regulations. It is anticipated that a draft of the model regulations will be submitted to the WRMC in October 2010. When approved by WRMC, the draft model regulations and codes of practice will be released for a four month public comment period. This will give businesses and individuals an opportunity to provide feedback to Safe Work Australia.

The Heads of Workplace Safety Authorities (HWSA) has established a framework for OHS regulators to work collaboratively to achieve COAG's harmonisation objective. Regulators are planning how they will support their jurisdictions to seamlessly transition to the new laws.

Comcare continues to play a central role in the Commonwealth jurisdiction's participation in the harmonisation process. Since the commencement of the process, Comcare has provided strategic and technical support to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations on model legislation, represented the Commonwealth on specialist and technical advisory groups and is playing a central role in the HWSA process.

To ensure a smooth transition to the new WHS laws, on 1 July 2010 Comcare established a project team that is focusing on developing the legislation to support the harmonisation agenda, adopting the model laws for the Commonwealth, identifying the service delivery approaches, and developing education and assistance for the jurisdiction. If you have any enquiries regarding harmonisation please call 1300 366 979.





## Incident notification in the Australian Federal Police—a system for success

Incident notification—is it simply a legislative requirement or something more? This topic is often discussed in the jurisdiction.

Points of discussion include how incident notification is conducted, why it needs to be done, what is notifiable, and how to integrate it into a system.

Many employers already have systems and processes in place. It can be difficult to correctly interpret the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 1991* (OHS Act) and understand the requirements of incident notification, including timeframes.

This is the story of how one organisation tackled the issue of incident notification and the benefits they discovered along the way. For the past 12 months, the Australian Federal Police (AFP) has used an online incident reporting and notification system. The system has significantly improved the AFP's internal capability to report incidents, capture information and identify trends. By using the system the agency is achieving 100 per cent compliance with the notification timeframes in the OHS Act.

## WHERE DID IT ALL START?

The AFP was experiencing difficulties with meeting notification timeframes. They identified this was due to the time taken for the appropriate internal people to be made aware that an incident had occurred. This time delay was impacting on the timely provision of early injury management intervention and the application, implementation and monitoring of risk control measures.

Given the diversity of AFP's workforce these difficulties were of particular concern to employees working in remote locations and those without direct regular contact with supervisors or managers.

## WHAT NEXT?

Senior AFP management endorsed a business case highlighting the need for an improved process. The AFP engaged an external consultant to facilitate the development of an online incident reporting and notification system. They decided the system should:

- > include an easily accessible incident notification report form
- > integrate information with existing HR systems
- > enable immediate information flow to relevant supervisors and managers, including escalation points if reports not actioned within specified time
- > automate notification to Comcare where applicable
- > prompt the hierarchy of control
- > facilitate monitoring of task completion
- > facilitate data analysis.

The AFP met with Comcare to discuss the specific requirements of the proposed system and to outline a plan of action.

## WHAT CHALLENGES WERE ENCOUNTERED?

The AFP conducted a 12 month review of the usability and content of the system. Overall the results were positive except for a challenge associated with notifying incidents that occurred on weekends or after normal business hours.

The system is designed to automatically workflow incidents to the relevant supervisor or manager for action. However, if the supervisor or manager is not available at that time then timely action and notification is not possible. This was of particular concern for incidents classified as serious personal injury (SPI) or dangerous occurrence (DO) as the OHS Act and associated regulations specify that notification for these types of incidents must occur within 24 hours.

## HOW WERE THESE CHALLENGES ADDRESSED?

A technical solution was identified. The AFP was able to re-design the workflow feature. This enabled notifications coded as SPI or DO to be automatically sent to Comcare on weekends or after normal business hours, thus ensuring continued compliance with timeframes.

## WHAT WERE THE OUTCOMES?

Implementation of AFP's incident reporting and notification system occurred in September 2008. The system was accepted positively by AFP users. Other encouraging outcomes included:

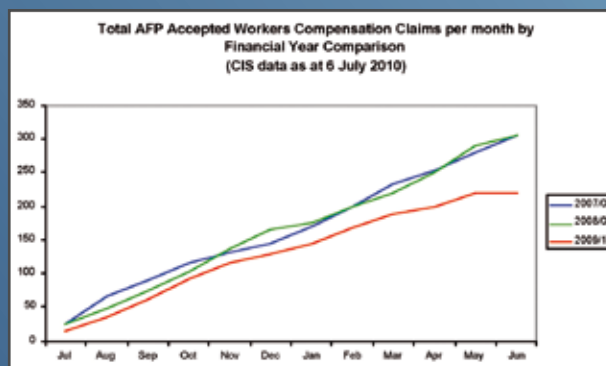
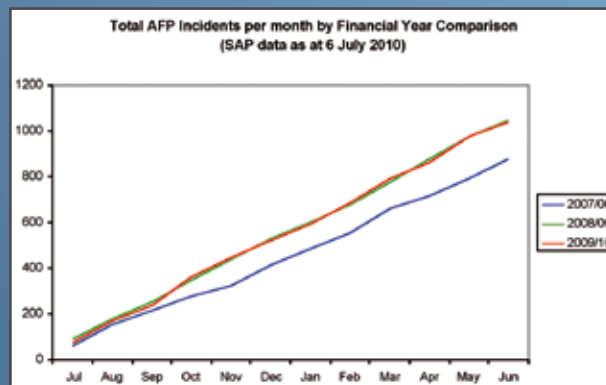
- > immediate communication of incident information to relevant stakeholders
- > an increase in the number of incidents reported
- > a decrease in the number of claims for compensation
- > an increase in the uptake of preventative wellbeing programs and early intervention services
- > compliance with Comcare notification timeframes from time of reporting.

Furthermore, incident reporting became centralised within AFP's National OHS section. This allows the AFP to effectively identify and analyse incident trends. The agency is then able to develop and implement early intervention and prevention services in response, and address systemic safety issues based on notifiable incidents.

Senior leaders in the AFP are focused on working with employees and their representatives to make changes to the way incidents are dealt with. They are ensuring that lessons learnt are not lost and that the agency continues to improve its health and safety outcomes for all employees.

## WORKING TOGETHER—WHAT WAS THIS LIKE?

The interactions between AFP and Comcare were positive and both parties found value in working together to achieve a positive outcome. Comcare was pleased to be able to contribute to a solution that fit the AFP. Both agencies are looking forward to further improvements to communication into the future.



If you want more information on incident notification or planning your own system upgrade, use Comcare's online general enquiry form, email [OHS.Help@comcare.gov.au](mailto:OHS.Help@comcare.gov.au) or call 1300 366 979 and ask for the OHS Helpdesk.

# Comcare's 2010 National Conference

Comcare's eighth annual National Conference will be held at the National Convention Centre in Canberra from 22-24 September 2010.

The conference is a great opportunity for our government and business partners to come together to better understand how we can provide healthier, safer workplaces for our colleagues. This year's conference has a major focus on mental health, social inclusion and employee wellbeing.

Leading industry experts and fellow workers will also examine topical issues including claim management, disability and caring for injured people. They will share continuous improvement strategies and leadership skills required to build a strong health and safety presence in your organisation that can make a practical difference to your workplace.

Keynote speakers include:

**David Crosbie—Chief Executive Officer, Mental Health Council of Australia**

David leads a peak national organisation that is driving mental health reform across Australia.

**Avril Henry**

Avril runs a management consulting business which focuses on leadership, change management, talent management, diversity, recruitment and retention strategies.

**John McGrath AM—Deputy Chairman, Beyondblue**

John was Inaugural Chair of the Mental Health Council of Australia and is a former member of the Victorian Government. He is also a board member of Headspace: National Youth Mental Health Foundation and most importantly, carer of a family member with a mental illness.

**Dr Rhonda Galbally—Chair, Disability Advisory Council of Victoria**

Dr Rhonda Galbally has focused her life's work on making a difference for a more equitable society. A Chief Executive Officer for 25 years in the business, philanthropic and government sectors, Rhonda has shown great leadership in finding effective solutions for social, health and economic development.

**Kieren Perkins**

Kieren is a hero of the Australian sporting arena. From Captain of swimming at Brisbane Boys' College in 1990, to dual Olympic gold medallist just six years later, Kieren has added an impressively long list of awards and achievements to his name.

**Craig Hamilton**

Craig started his career as ABC radio's 'Sideline Eye' on weekend Rugby League broadcasts in 1994. Since then he has been a member of the ABC team working on the past 14 Grand Finals, every State of Origin series and a number of Test Matches.

Make sure you join your industry peers in Canberra in September 2010. It will be an interesting and stimulating event. Register now at [www.comcare.gov.au](http://www.comcare.gov.au).

## Comcare Stress Down Month

Did you know 9 out  
of 10 Australians are  
stressed?



There are many of us who feel stressed at work and sometimes we take that stress home to our families and friends.

The Comcare Stress Down Month from 23 July to 20 August 2010 was implemented to provide Comcare employees with information, tools and activities to help reduce the burden of stress on our community and our lives.

Lifeline's Stress Down Day on Friday 23 July was the launch date for our new Stress Down Month. Employees dressed down by wearing their slippers to work. The day was enjoyed by all and we raised \$1060 for Lifeline. These funds will go towards funding Lifeline's 24 hour telephone counselling service to help more Australians and save more lives.

Throughout the month Comcare employees were provided with tools and information to help them understand the effects stress can have on the body and what can be done to reduce high stress levels.



Name:  
Kate Cleary

Organisation:  
Department of  
Immigration and  
Citizenship

Role:  
Trainee Rehabilitation  
Case Manager

WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO APPLY FOR THE CERTIFICATE IV IN INJURY REHABILITATION MANAGEMENT SCHOLARSHIP?

I joined the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) Health and Safety Section in the Injury Prevention Team in March 2009. I found the work very interesting as it covers a broad area of health and safety. During this period I was able to observe and interact with the outstanding work of our Rehabilitation Case Management Team.

Whilst in the Health and Safety Section I became very interested in the case management role and it wasn't long before I got the opportunity to join the team to commence development as a trainee Rehabilitation Case Manager. Shortly after this, the Comcare scholarship was advertised and it was the ideal opportunity for me to secure my Certificate IV training and enhance my career with a formal qualification.

WHAT DOES REHABILITATION MEAN TO YOU?

To me, rehabilitation is the process undertaken to repair an injury or overcome an illness and return to pre-injury health. Successful rehabilitation is critical in assisting DIAC to reduce not only the financial cost associated with employee injuries and illnesses, but also the significant human cost.

I believe that successful rehabilitation requires early intervention and a focus on safe, durable and timely return to work outcomes that are based on medical guidance and consistent with operational/business requirements.

Successful rehabilitation also requires the ability to think creatively when faced with barriers and involves a holistic approach to working with all stakeholders through clear, close and regular communication.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT BEING CHOSEN AS A WINNER OF THE SCHOLARSHIP?

I feel very fortunate and excited about being chosen as a recipient of the Comcare Certificate IV in Injury Rehabilitation Management scholarship. I am excited to have the opportunity to build valuable networking contacts and interact with industry professionals within the rehabilitation field, and to gain a formal qualification in my chosen career. I look forward to the challenge of applying the knowledge I gain so that I can effectively support ill and injured employees in the workplace.

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO MOST IN STUDYING THE CERTIFICATE IV IN INJURY REHABILITATION MANAGEMENT?

I am looking forward to the face-to-face training, networking and interacting with other agency staff. I hope to build new relationships and share my experiences with others. I am also looking forward to increasing my knowledge and strengthening my capabilities so I can better support all stakeholders involved in the return to work process.

# Government and industry leaders meet Professor Sir Mansel Aylward

On 18 May 2010 Government leaders from the federal safety and compensation jurisdiction, industry leaders and social partners ACTU attended a dinner in Sydney with special guest Professor Sir Mansel Aylward CB.

Professor Aylward is one of the world's leading experts in psychosocial, economic and cultural factors that influence health, illness and recovery.

## WORK IS GOOD FOR OUR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

At the dinner Professor Aylward shared his experience in major health systems review in Wales. His fundamental message was clear—work is good for our health and wellbeing. He explained that long-term worklessness has the equivalent health risk of smoking ten packs of cigarettes per day. Worklessness is therefore one of the greatest known risks to public health.

Professor Aylward's work sends a powerful message of the moral obligation we all have to "rigorously attack an individual's obstacles to a life at work" and minimise the impact of injury on workers and the community.

## PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS ARE THE MAIN DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH, ILLNESS AND RECOVERY

An individual's health status depends more on lifestyle, environmental, and socio-cultural factors than on biological status and conventional health care. This is also true of recovery following an injury.

For some injured workers, personal and social factors can aggravate disability and act as obstacles to recovery and return to work. An individual's beliefs about their injury and recovery, their social circumstances and support all play a pivotal role in return to work. For those who have difficulties returning to work, focusing on the medical condition alone is therefore not enough.

## MANAGEMENT OF COMMON HEALTH PROBLEMS MUST ADDRESS OBSTACLES TO RECOVERY

Successful outcomes in injury management are dependant on addressing an individual's personal, social and environmental obstacles to return to work. Professor Aylward described

a “condition management” approach in which the individual learns self management and independence. Injured workers should be provided with:

- > cognitive and educational interventions that assist them to understand the nature of their injury and appropriate self management strategies as part of their rehabilitation
- > evidence based treatment linked to functional improvements
- > rehabilitation that is tailored taking into consideration the individual, their injury and the social context
- > a co-ordinated approach to case management by a designated case worker
- > goals that are not imposed and which reflect the individuals concerns, preferences and expectations.

This approach highlights new roles for health professionals that involve recovery coaching and guidance rather than “therapy”.

#### THE EXPERIENCE OF INJURED WORKERS MATTERS

Building an individual’s confidence to return to work is important. The support of the workplace and the way line managers respond to an injury are critical to the injured worker’s experience. Managers need to talk to workers who are ill or injured, seek to address barriers, and build their trust and confidence to return to work. This support is critical to prevent disability and long-term worklessness. The manager also has a key role in recognising people who may be at work but unwell.

Professor Aylward described a set of positive workplace characteristics that increase the likelihood of a return to work. An individual is more likely to return to work if they:

- > have a high level of respect from the employer
- > feel valued
- > trust their line manager
- > have the support of their colleagues.





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