



**WORKING WITH** *YOU*  
ISSUE 49 | SUMMER EDITION

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**Australian Government**

**Comcare**

**PUTTING YOU** *FIRST*

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

### Harmonisation of work health and safety is the number one priority of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

With the model legislation in place, we are currently working on the draft model of Work Health and Safety Regulations and the most important Codes of Practice.

Comcare is holding focus groups to identify the changes and challenges we all need to address to make a seamless transition to new work health and safety laws.

Another area of great interest is this year's SRCC Safety Awards which will be announced in September. Nominations are now open with wide interest expected. You can read more on page 3.

The plight of many Australians due to recent summer weather events have moved us all.

Nightly news bulletins starkly capture the effects of these natural disasters, but the psychological effects can be even greater. As an article in this edition points out, Comcare is one of a range of Government agencies working to support those affected in our community as they get their lives back on track.

Reviewing how we regulate work health and safety and workers' compensation laws is vital to Comcare's continuing success in preventing workplace harm. You will read that under the 2015 Plan Comcare is reshaping as a more integrated, preventative and proactive regulator.

#### Publication details

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PUB28 Issue 49  
ISSN 1 921160 13 6

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We now have an even stronger focus on prevention and on assisting injured workers to achieve an early and sustained return to work.

This month we have implemented a new service delivery model to better manage claims for workers' compensation and improve our services.

Social research is also part of our new way of doing business, providing a clear direction and commitment to the provision of improved services, greater efficiencies and better outcomes.

The development of this new program of research will help provide greater intelligence and insights into the expectations, perceptions, experiences and levels of satisfaction of those in our community.

Comcare is committed to finding better ways of working. Our goals are simple, to prevent workplace harm and to help people return to good health and good work.

Paul O'Connor  
CEO





**Australian Government**  
**Safety, Rehabilitation and  
Compensation Commission**

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**SRCC  
SAFETY  
AWARDS**

## **WE'RE SEARCHING FOR THIS YEAR'S WINNERS**

If your organisation is dedicated to ensuring its people are central to its success and can demonstrate effective management practices in all facets of work health and safety or rehabilitation, then nominate for the 2011 Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission (SRCC) Safety Awards.

The six award categories are:

- 1) Best Workplace Health and Wellbeing Program
- 2) Leadership Award for Injury or Disease Prevention and Management
- 3) Best Workplace Health and Safety Management System
- 4) Best Solution to an Identified Workplace Health and Safety Issue
- 5) Best Individual Contribution to Health and Safety

Two awards will be given under the following sub-categories:

- a) An employee (eg: Health and Safety Representative)
- b) An outstanding contribution by a person with responsibility for OHS as part of their duties.

- 6) Rehabilitation and Return to Work Award

Two awards will be given under the following sub-categories:

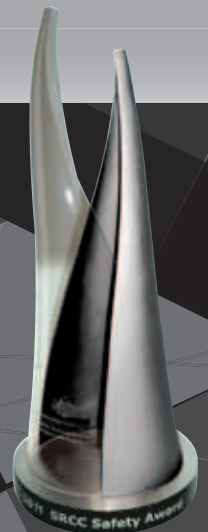
- a) An organisation that has demonstrated excellence and innovation in rehabilitation and return to work
- b) An outstanding contribution by an individual in rehabilitation and return to work.

Details on the awards and assessment criteria for each category can be found at [www.srcc.gov.au](http://www.srcc.gov.au) or phone 1300 366 979.

**Nominations close—18 April 2011**

Winners will be announced at a gala dinner event on 13 September 2011 in Melbourne as part of Comcare's National Conference.

*Collaboration, Innovation, Celebration*



# Harmonisation of work health and safety laws update

Our next milestone in the journey towards OHS harmonisation is the draft model Work Health and Safety (WHS) Regulations and Priority Codes of Practice.

The package released by Safe Work Australia in December 2010 is open for public comment until 4 April 2011. You can access this at [www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au](http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au)

Comcare is seeking input from the jurisdiction by conducting focus groups during February 2011. The aim is to assist OHS professionals and specialists who work with the current OHS Act, Regulations and Codes of Practice to identify any major changes and challenges that the model WHS Regulations package may present to the jurisdiction.

Comcare is committed to assist the jurisdiction to seamlessly transition to the new WHS laws through the delivery of a wide range of products and services. Comcare's current activities include hosting workshops for all interested workers, HSRs, team leaders, managers, employee representatives, and OHS professionals to participate and share their concerns, challenges and ideas about the transition. The workshops provide a platform to work together in the design of products and services to prepare for the transition to the new laws.

For information and registration for the workshops and focus groups please visit [www.comcare.gov.au/events](http://www.comcare.gov.au/events). Please note that spaces are limited for each location so you are encouraged to register as early as possible. Registrations for each workshop and/or focus group will close one week prior to the scheduled event date.

A strong theme of working together continues across Australia as all states, territories and the Commonwealth journey towards harmonisation. For example, regulators are contributing to the development of a national curriculum for inspectors, common principles of inspection, compliance and enforcement policies and many other policies and procedures to support a consistent approach.

If you have any questions about harmonisation, please visit [www.comcare.gov.au](http://www.comcare.gov.au) and review the Frequently Asked Questions or submit your questions to Comcare's Project Harmony Group. The Group can be contacted on 1300 366 979 or email [ohs.help@comcare.gov.au](mailto:ohs.help@comcare.gov.au).

We look forward to working with you in the transition to the new WHS laws for the benefit of all Australians.

## Case study—lesson learned

In 2006 the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 1991* (OHS Act) was changed to introduce Health and Safety Management Arrangements (HSMAs).

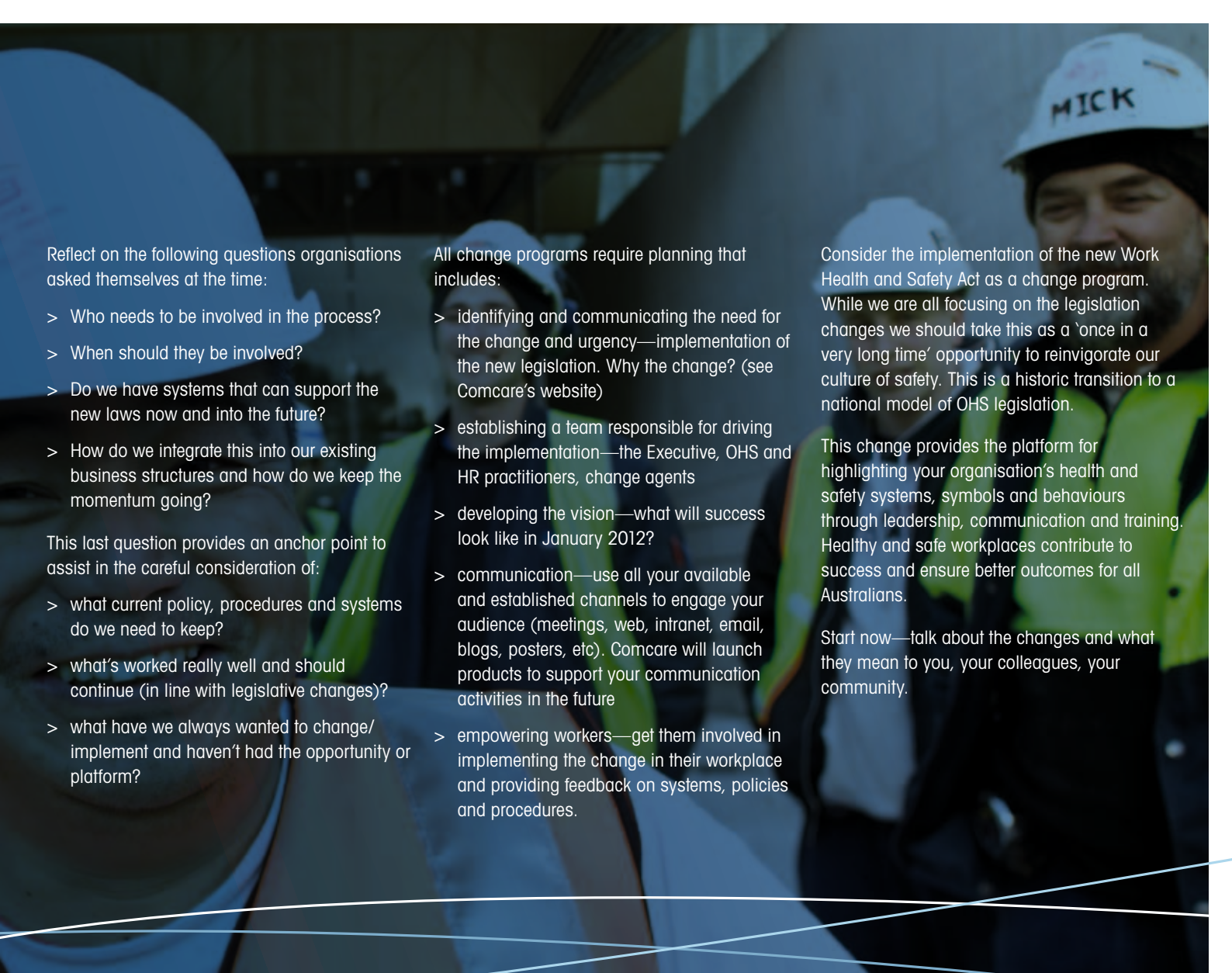
Organisations in Comcare's jurisdiction went through a process of reviewing their OHS policy and agreements to establish HSMAs. The purpose of this change was to ensure employees had a voice about decisions that affect their health and safety through a structured framework of OHS policy, procedures and governance.

Now in 2011, the new Work Health and Safety Act is pending. Can we learn from the past to help us transition to the new legislation?

Any change to legislation has a ripple effect of change to organisations. It affects those of us who need to administer the changes, to those of us who manage teams by integrating safety into everyday business, and all workers who live a culture of health and safety.

What we learned as a jurisdiction was:

- > the legislation change provides the framework
- > the framework needs to be adapted to fit each organisation, there is no one size fits all formula
- > each organisation has its own unique culture, work type, size, environment, hazards, policies and procedures to consider
- > the process of implementing HSMAs provided an opportunity to review organisation's OHS systems and culture of safety
- > developing an OHS awareness culture in the workplace was achieved by ensuring everyone was involved in the process
- > effective safety cultures are characterised by good communication and integration into everyday business to enhance safety and elevate morale and productivity
- > endorsement from the employer is significant, but not enough. A demonstrated commitment through behaviour is required
- > early executive engagement in planning for the changes was vital. This showed executive endorsement of the process and a demonstrated commitment to facilitating the implementation
- > giving workers a level of ownership and input to the decisions that directly affect their health and safety.



Reflect on the following questions organisations asked themselves at the time:

- > Who needs to be involved in the process?
- > When should they be involved?
- > Do we have systems that can support the new laws now and into the future?
- > How do we integrate this into our existing business structures and how do we keep the momentum going?

This last question provides an anchor point to assist in the careful consideration of:

- > what current policy, procedures and systems do we need to keep?
- > what's worked really well and should continue (in line with legislative changes)?
- > what have we always wanted to change/ implement and haven't had the opportunity or platform?

All change programs require planning that includes:

- > identifying and communicating the need for the change and urgency—implementation of the new legislation. Why the change? (see Comcare's website)
- > establishing a team responsible for driving the implementation—the Executive, OHS and HR practitioners, change agents
- > developing the vision—what will success look like in January 2012?
- > communication—use all your available and established channels to engage your audience (meetings, web, intranet, email, blogs, posters, etc). Comcare will launch products to support your communication activities in the future
- > empowering workers—get them involved in implementing the change in their workplace and providing feedback on systems, policies and procedures.

Consider the implementation of the new Work Health and Safety Act as a change program. While we are all focusing on the legislation changes we should take this as a 'once in a very long time' opportunity to reinvigorate our culture of safety. This is a historic transition to a national model of OHS legislation.

This change provides the platform for highlighting your organisation's health and safety systems, symbols and behaviours through leadership, communication and training. Healthy and safe workplaces contribute to success and ensure better outcomes for all Australians.

Start now—talk about the changes and what they mean to you, your colleagues, your community.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit [www.comcare.gov.au](http://www.comcare.gov.au) and go to the Frequently Accessed Content—Harmonisation of Work Health and Safety Laws. Participate in upcoming Events—see 'key education and consultation activities'.

Provide feedback:

Email: [ohs.help@comcare.gov.au](mailto:ohs.help@comcare.gov.au) | Phone: 1300 366 979 (ask for the Project Harmony team)

## Coping through the crisis

Some people may remember the 1974 floods in Queensland when the Brisbane River broke its banks, flooding the surrounding areas and leaving a trail of devastation in its path. Thirty-seven years later Queensland has experienced devastating floods again.

The effects of a crisis such as floods or bush fires are widespread and can impact on the physical and mental health of people directly affected as well as by those providing assistance and support. This includes emergency services, volunteers and those providing support services such as Centrelink.

Many people are experiencing the loss of their businesses, homes, jobs and even for some the loss of loved ones. 'A lot of people will experience short-term distress over the first week or so', says Darryl Wade, Clinical Psychologist and Director of Education and Training with the Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health. 'Reactions can include fear, sadness, frustration, anger, trouble sleeping, difficulty concentrating, and if they're exposed to a life-threatening event, people may also have distressing thoughts about the event'.

These are normal reactions to an abnormal event. For most people, these feelings will slowly decline. However, for some people they may have a lasting impact and it is important that they receive early help and support. If you are worried about yourself, a family member, friend or colleague it is important that you seek help early. The most important thing to remember is that you are not alone. Help is available from:

- > Employee Assistance Programs
- > Lifeline on 13 11 14
- > QLD Community Recovery Line on 1800 173 349.

We are seeing incredible support: neighbours, work colleagues and people within communities pulling together to clean up, comfort each other and share experiences and feelings. It is important that those involved in the relief effort are vigilant and maintain safety during this time. Possible health and safety risks include:

- > hydration
- > fatigue
- > sunburn
- > underlying health issues
- > biological and chemical hazards
- > personal protective equipment
- > manual handling
- > hand and personal hygiene
- > dangerous goods and buildings
- > asbestos.

More information on Occupational Health and Safety during a crisis can be found in the article 'Flood recovery—OHS considerations' on the Comcare website at [www.comcare.gov.au](http://www.comcare.gov.au)

## Regulation policy

Under Comcare's 2015 plan, Comcare is reshaping its role as a more integrated, preventative and proactive regulator. Accordingly, Comcare has revised its OHS Enforcement Policy and developed a more integrated Regulation Policy. The policy outlines Comcare's approach to regulation, reflects developments in the model work health and safety laws and integrates rehabilitation.

There is a stronger focus on prevention and on assisting injured workers to return to health and achieve an early and sustained return to work. As a regulator, this means being more proactive, gaining a better understanding of federal workplaces and targeting areas of greatest risk.

Part of this new approach includes the creation of an inspectorate capability to deliver on work health and safety regulation now and into the future under the model work health and safety laws.

Inspection activities include implementing cooperative compliance programs typically consisting of one or more pro-active initiatives such as audits, site visits and education. These programs will be developed and undertaken collaboratively with employers, workers and employee representatives to invest in and deliver improved safety outcomes.

During a cooperative compliance program, Inspectors can provide information and advice about managing work health and safety related risks. Cooperative compliance programs are designed to assist employers and workers achieve continuous improvement using a planned and integrated approach to the management of rehabilitation and work health and safety related risks.

It is envisaged that the new regulation policy will be supplemented and complemented by other key documents, including revised rehabilitation guidelines. A draft of the regulation policy and Comcare's 2010-2011 work health and safety plan are available on Comcare's website ([www.comcare.gov.au](http://www.comcare.gov.au)).

The Plan aligns work health and safety objectives (ranging from national to targeted health and safety campaigns) with Comcare's 2015 Plan.

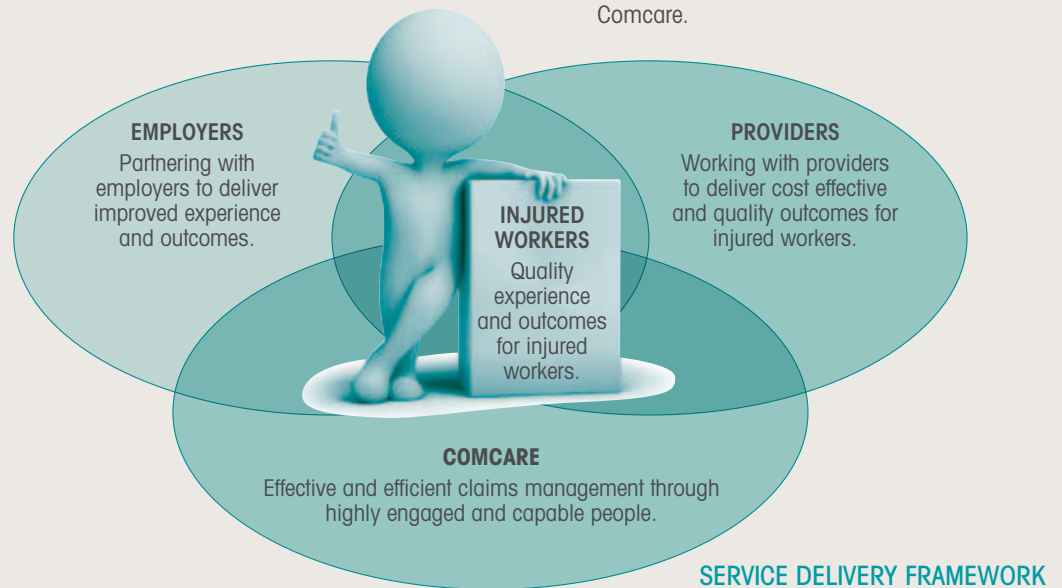
Currently the 2010-11 Work Health and Safety Plan has been released and implementation is underway. After consultation, the 2011-12 Work Health and Safety Plan is being developed and refined by applying rigorous program logic methodology. An operational framework is also being developed to ensure consistency in monitoring, evaluation and reporting.

## Ongoing claims management

On 7 February 2011 Comcare introduced a co-designed Service Delivery Model for the management of claims for workers' compensation.

This model includes a new claims segmentation model which will involve an internal restructure within the Recovery and Support Group. The aim of this segmentation model is to streamline procedures and improve the focus of our business on the injured worker.

Some of the Claims Services Officers (CSOs) that you deal with on a day to-day basis may change roles and you may be working with a new CSO. This change in role is part of the new Service Delivery Model, which allows our CSOs to provide customised service and timely support to injured workers and their employers. With this new focus, we aim to ensure that you, as the employer, and the injured worker receive the most efficient service possible from Comcare.



# New research program

## BACKGROUND

Comcare has recently established Strategy 2015 which provides a clear direction and commitment to the provision of improved services, greater efficiencies and better outcomes. Key Performance Indicator (KPI) Surveys will be integral to monitoring progress towards our goals, as well as providing greater insights to help Comcare meet its business objectives and reporting needs.

The development of this new program of research will help provide greater intelligence and insights into the attitudes, perceptions, experiences and levels of satisfaction of key stakeholders and clients, as well as monitor progress against key performance indicators.

## OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the KPI Surveys project is to establish a program of research that will:

- > provide better insights and understandings into our key stakeholder and client groups
- > help inform the decision making of operational areas, and
- > capture critical data required for the reporting of a range of KPIs.

The KPI Surveys will also contribute to Comcare's strategic priorities and goals by:

- > supporting our strategic themes
- > contributing to our strategic focus, and
- > providing both direct and indirect input and monitoring to a number of strategic priorities.

## WHO IS INVOLVED?

The Research Team will take the lead on the development and implementation of each survey, with input from other areas of the organisation.

Additional resources will be required to assist with these research programs so a tender has been put out inviting external research providers to submit a proposal to take on this important support role.

## TYPES OF SURVEYS

The scope of the new research program will involve the development and implementation of a range of instruments, including, but not necessarily limited to:

- > An **Injured Worker Survey** which will provide greater insights into the attitudes, perceptions, experiences, outcomes and expectations of injured workers involved in the Comcare workers' compensation scheme, including those employed by Self-Insured employers
- > An **Employer Survey** which will provide greater insights into the experiences of agencies and employers (including Licensees) in relation to Comcare, the Comcare workers' compensation scheme (where applicable) and occupational health and safety in the workplace

- > An **HSR Survey** which will provide greater insights and understanding of HSRs working in the Comcare scheme in relation to such things as perceptions and awareness of Comcare, occupational health and safety in the workplace, health and well being in the workplace and exposure to hazards, and
- > A **Case Manager Survey** which will provide greater insights into the attitudes, perceptions and experiences of case managers, both internal and external to Comcare.

## WHEN WILL IT ALL START?

It is intended that surveys will be conducted twice each year, once in April/May and once in October/November. This will be reviewed once we have a better idea of the type of information we are collecting and how useful it is to us. The first wave of data collection is intended to commence in May this year.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information about the new research program please contact the Research Team on [researchteam@comcare.com.au](mailto:researchteam@comcare.com.au)



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