4.0 HEALTH SAFETY AND WELLBEING IN THE WORKPLACE

Provide a workplace that protects workers from harm, promotes worker health and supports the ability of older workers and those with ill health and disability to engage and continue to work.

WHY IT MATTERS

Good work is good for you. While there is a complex relationship between health and work, people in work are generally healthier. Work that is healthy, safe and well designed is generally good for both physical and mental wellbeing. Conversely, the workplace also has the potential to harm workers, through physical or psychological injuries and illnesses. Hazard assessment and effective risk management needs to encompass both the risks to the safety, and long-term health of workers. Overall, the beneficial effects of good work far outweigh the risks.

‘Work is the most effective means to improve the wellbeing of individuals, their families and communities.’

Waddell and Burton’s Is work good for your health and wellbeing?

Investing in health and wellbeing makes good business sense. Organisations that invest in health and wellbeing initiatives see benefits that are broader than the financial gains from reducing absenteeism, accidents and injuries. Health and wellbeing programs that address the health risks of workers within the organisation lead to increased staff engagement, reduced turnover and higher productivity.

The workplace, and its associated health and wellbeing approach, has a critical role to play in:

> preventing illness and injury, by eliminating or minimising exposure to hazards or risks, and the promotion of health and wellbeing

> intervening early for those who are injured, unwell or have developed a health condition can help them to participate in work to support their health or assist their recovery

> supporting those with injury or illness can allow them to continue working.

The workplace is well placed to reduce the rising prevalence of lifestyle related chronic disease by positively influencing the health and wellbeing of its workers.
4.1 MEET OBLIGATIONS UNDER WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY LEGISLATION

Take action to protect workers from harm at work, in compliance with the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (WHS Act). Understand the legislative requirements, including the scope of duty of care, and the requirement to consult workers, and apply a risk management approach to resolving issues affecting the health or safety of workers.

Consult your older workers. PCBUs must consult with workers, so far as is reasonably practicable, whenever they are likely to be directly affected by a health and safety matter. This duty to consult is based on the recognition that worker input and participation improves decision-making about health and safety matters and assists in reducing work-related injuries and disease.

Use risk management to minimise exposure to workplace health and safety risks. A safe and healthy workplace relies on identification of risks and potential consequences. Consider what can be done, whatever is 'reasonably practicable’ to eliminate or minimise the health and safety risks arising from your business or undertaking. Applying a risk management approach enables duty holders to proactively and systematically prevent harm to health and safety. The *Code of Practice on How to Manage Health and Safety Risks* provides practical guidance for persons who have duties under the WHS Act and Regulations to manage risks to health and safety.

*The information below is general information only and should not be used as a substitute for independent legal advice and cannot be relied upon as a statement of law relating to the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Cth) and Work Health and Safety Regulations 2011 (Cth). It is recommended that duty-holders obtain appropriate independent legal and other expert advice relevant to their particular needs and circumstances.*

WHY IT MATTERS

The WHS Act, together with the *Work Health and Safety Regulations 2011*, prescribe duties in relation to protecting health and safety at work, while approved codes of practice provide practical guidance to achieve a healthy and safe workplace.

HOW IT IS DONE

Exercise your duty of care. Persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) have a duty of care under the WHS Act to ensure the health and safety of workers. Effective risk management starts with a commitment to health and safety from those who operate and manage the business or undertaking. Officers of the Commonwealth are required to exercise due diligence to ensure the PCBU complies with duties or obligations under the WHS legislation. This means eliminating or minimising physical and psychosocial risks to health and safety, including those faced by older workers. Organisations need to ensure that they take a systematic approach to managing WHS that addresses all aspects of this duty.
4.2 PREVENT HARM IN THE WORKPLACE

Consider the varying vulnerabilities of all members of the workforce, understand what these may be for older workers, and take action to prevent harm to health.

WHY IT MATTERS

Age related changes can affect an individual’s capacity in specific ways. However, with appropriate work adjustment these changes do not need to affect work ability.

As more people choose to remain at work beyond what was previously considered to be the common retirement age, employers need to be proactive in identifying and addressing risks to work participation.

HOW IT IS DONE

Educate line managers and others with WHS responsibilities. This should cover common age-related changes and implications for health and safety, as well as preventative and remedial measures that can be put in place. Everyone experiences ageing differently, depending on age, lifestyle, finances, fitness level and genetics. It is important to avoid assumptions about an individual’s capacity to work based purely on their age.

Implement risk management processes and activities that consider individual workers’ capacities. Risk profiles for older workers should be no higher than for other workers and work should be matched to the capacities of the worker. An advantage of this approach is that action taken to reduce risks to older workers often has the potential to improve health outcomes for others in the workplace.

Consider the work to be done. Some specific work may place undue stress or risks on older workers. High risk work needs to be addressed. Address and manage the career movements and expectations of workers who perform high risk work, to achieve seamless transitions to alternative roles before injuries occur.

Be proactive, not reactive. Implement measures that prevent harm to health for the whole of the workforce, understanding that harm to the health of younger workers may impact on their health and ability to work in later years. One way of proactively preventing harm to health and safety is to make sure the work to be done is good work.

See Chapter 4.3 Promote the health of workers for more information on good work.

See Chapter 3.4 for more information on providing alternative or enriched work roles.
4.3 PROMOTE THE HEALTH OF WORKERS

Create workplaces that support and promote worker health and wellbeing and encourage workers to make, and enjoy the benefits of healthy lifestyle choices.

WHY IT MATTERS

Workplaces are centre stage when it comes to influencing, educating and supporting health and wellbeing.

Good health is good business. Good employee health and wellbeing boosts organisational health. The benefits to business in supporting the health and wellbeing of employees are now well established. Promoting health and wellbeing is, and should be an extension of the approach to preventing harm to employees. The workplace can play a critical role in slowing the acceleration of the risks associated with age and lifestyle related chronic diseases.

Integrated workplace health and wellbeing programs can significantly improve the health of workers, including preventing or delaying the onset of chronic disease and disability in older workers.

Health and wellbeing programs are associated with:

> Improved work performance and productivity, reduced costs associated with absenteeism, presenteeism, disability, staff turnover and workers’ compensation.

Good work promotes good health. Good work is work that is meaningful to the worker and the work team. Consider how staff members feel valued by the organisation and what may motivate them to perform well, without undue stress that may lead to poor health. Evidence-based characteristics of good work include:

> The worker is able to manage the demands of the work—workload, work patterns and working environment.

> Individuals have control—a say in the way they do their work.

> Workers receive support—encouragement, sponsorship and resources from the organisation, their managers and their colleagues.

> There are cohesive working relationships with effective communication practices—positive working relationships avoid conflict and deal with unacceptable behaviour.

> People understand their role within the organisation.

> Organisational change is communicated and well managed.

Successful programs are cost effective, often returning in the realm of $5.81 for every $1 invested in employee health and wellbeing. L S Chapman, Proof Positive.

An Analysis of the Cost Effectiveness of Worksite Wellness, Chapman Institute, 2007.

‘The quality of the experience that a person has in their workplace is also likely to impact on health and wellbeing.’

Dame Carol Black’s 2006 review of the health of Britain’s working age population, Working for a healthier tomorrow.
HOW IT IS DONE

Take a strategic approach to implementing health and wellbeing to make sure they are effective. Health and wellbeing programs need to be designed to meet the needs and risks of workers. Aggregated data on the health of older workers and their risk factors should inform the content of the program. The Finnish Work Ability is an example of an approach that offers a holistic means of assessing and managing the risks and needs of an organisation’s workforce.

Actively involve senior managers in health and wellbeing initiatives to demonstrate leadership commitment. Senior management buy-in is essential for success. Senior management involvement must extend beyond endorsement of programs to active and visible participation in health and wellbeing initiatives. Link leadership commitment to performance expectations of senior managers. This will help shape the culture of the organisation.

Create a supportive environment and a culture focused on wellness. Embed health and wellbeing into the way things are done within the organisation. Actions to achieve this include:

> aligning health and wellbeing programs with organisational strategies
> integrating program elements into organisational systems
> modifying the physical environment to support healthy lifestyle choices, such as healthy food choices and engaging in physical activity.

Establish effective two-way communication. While workers need to understand the importance of wellness, they also need to be involved in each stage of the process. Ask questions to determine workers’ needs, motivations, interests and knowledge and keep them informed of progress and outcomes. In particular, workers need to clearly understand that participation in health and wellbeing programs and health assessments is voluntary and individual results will be kept confidential.

Plan, execute and manage programs using a continuous improvement cycle. Ongoing program sustainability and success will depend on continuous assessment and improvement of initiatives to ensure their ongoing relevance and effectiveness.

Measure and monitor the results. Link health and wellbeing initiatives to key lead indicators to gauge the level of wellness activity and its impact in order to demonstrate program effectiveness to senior management. This could include assessing the impact of the program on age-related risk factors and health indicators. Note that good baseline data is needed in order to conduct a before-and-after comparison. It is likely to take three to five years before a quantifiable return on investment can be seen.
4.4 SUPPORT THE ABILITY TO WORK

Support the ability of individuals with injury, ill health or disability to enable them to participate in the workplace to the best of their potential. This means acting to support workers with a health problem or injury to stay on or return after illness, and helping people with a disability to work effectively in the workplace.

‘We have an obligation to rigorously attack an individual’s obstacles to a life at work and minimise the impact of injury on workers and the community.’

Sir Mansel Aylward, Realising the Health Benefits of Work Policy Launch Presentation, Australasian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 18 May 2010.

WHY IT MATTERS

Older workers are more likely than younger ones to have ill health, most often related to the development of common chronic diseases. Employment is an important factor contributing to the health and wellbeing of people who are sick or have a disability. The positive effect of work on health and wellbeing is illustrated in a survey that found Australian workers with major health conditions assessed their health as better than their peers with similar conditions who were not working.11

Supporting workers with illness, injury or disability to enable them to realise their full potential at work reduces the harmful effects of long-term sickness absence, reducing risk of incapacity and poverty, and improving recovery, rehabilitation and health and wellbeing outcomes. To employers it is likely to bring significant benefits, including improved work performance and productivity, reduced absenteeism and high levels of engagement and loyalty. For the Australian community it means less reliance on social and health support systems.

HOW IT IS DONE

While work is generally good for physical and mental health and wellbeing, the work offered needs to suit an individual’s knowledge, skills and circumstances—and be undertaken in a safe and supportive environment.

Build a workplace culture that acknowledges the role of work in health and wellbeing. Encourage a focus on people’s capacity to work, rather than incapacity, ensure the benefits of work as part of rehabilitation are understood by all, remove system barriers to work participation and utilise opportunities to both return and keep people in work.

Build the age management skills and confidence of front line managers. Wellbeing, engagement and resilience are strongly influenced by how people are treated on a day-to-day basis. Line manager capability is the key to workers feeling supported in the workplace. Effective line managers with the right skills will be able to recognise signs that a worker is not coping well and will intervene early by offering appropriate support. Support may mean altering work practices, patterns, tasks or job roles or offering increased flexibility. Chapter 5 Front line Confidence provides more information on building line manager capability.

Implement effective workplace rehabilitation, including early intervention, and absence management processes. All injuries and illnesses experienced by workers should be appropriately managed in the workplace, regardless of whether or not they are work related. When workers who are ill or have been injured are supported to remain at work, or return to work at an early stage, they recover more quickly and with less likelihood of relapse. In relation to mental health and musculoskeletal conditions, early recognition of warning signs—such as discomfort or signs of stress—and risks, may prevent injury or illness from developing.

Provide sufficient flexibility in the workplace. Flexibility in the workplace is important to the retention of good staff. Tailored flexible working arrangements or workplace modifications can be offered to workers to support their health and wellbeing and enable them to contribute in the workplace to the best of their ability. Consider both the needs of the worker and the requirements of the job in identifying and negotiating suitable arrangements. Chapters 3: Work Design and 5: Front line Confidence of this guide provide more information about flexible work.

Design work to protect and promote workers’ health, safety and wellbeing. The Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012-2022 has highlighted the need to design work to eliminate or minimise risks to the health, safety and wellbeing of workers at work. When designing work the abilities, diversity and vulnerabilities of workers need to be considered and accommodated, including those returning to work following injury or illness. Chapter 3: Better match work to older workers, of this guide, provides more information on job design.

Access further support, if required. There are many sources of further support available to employers and workers, both financial and advisory. Ensure workers are aware of, and have access to the support available to them.
4.0—Health safety and wellbeing in the workplace

*Working for a healthier tomorrow* is a comprehensive review of work and the health of Britain’s working age population. It discusses the evidence base for supporting health and work.

Is work good for your health and wellbeing? This website provides an evidence base for work and wellbeing.

PricewaterhouseCoopers assessed the case for investing in workplace health and wellbeing in the United Kingdom in *Building the case for wellness*.

4.1—Meet obligations under work health and safety legislation

A full description of the PCBU’s primary duty of care is detailed in section 19 of the WHS Act.

The *Code of Practice: Work Health and Safety Consultation, Co-operation and Co-ordination* provides detailed, practical guidance on how to comply with the requirements of the WHS legislation in relation to consultation with workers.

The *Code of Practice: How to Manage Work Health and Safety Risks* provides detailed, practical guidance on how to manage work health and safety risks in compliance with the WHS legislation.

Safe Work Australia provides guidance on interpreting WHS legislation, including the meaning of reasonably practicable.

The Comcare website contains a range of information on promoting health and safety and preventing harm at work.

4.2—Prevent harm in the workplace

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) UK provides guidance on *Managing a healthy ageing workforce*.

Safe Work Australia specifically considers the issue of older workers in their *Surveillance Alert, OHS and the Ageing Workforce*.

The Western Australian Department of Commerce provides an *Older workers and safety guide*, that helps stakeholders understand and manage the safety and health needs of older workers.

Detailed guidance on keeping older workers safe and healthy at work is provided in *Safe and Healthy: A Guide to Managing an Aging Workforce* by the Government of Alberta, Canada.

The Comcare website contains a range of information on promoting health and safety and preventing harm at work.
4.3—Promote the health of workers

Comcare provides information on designing and implementing workplace health and wellbeing programs and the Finnish Work Ability approach.

The Department of Health and Ageing’s Healthy Workers Portal contains many resources relevant to workplace health and wellbeing programs.

PricewaterhouseCoopers assessed the case for investing in workplace health and wellbeing in the United Kingdom in Building the case for wellness.

Dame Carol Black’s 2006 review of the health of Britain’s working age population, Working for a healthier tomorrow explains the experience of a person in their workplace is also likely to impact on their health and wellbeing.

4.4—Support the ability to work

Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012–2022 by Safe Work Australia, highlights the need to design work to eliminate and minimise risks to the health, safety and wellbeing of workers at work.

Comcare provides guidance on early intervention, rehabilitation and return to work for employers and workers.

A valuable source of support for employers and workers is the JobAccess website, which provides help and workplace solutions for the employment of people with disability.

Various Tool kits provide information and advice on a range of disability employment issues. Financial help is available to assist the employment of people with disability.

Job in jeopardy assistance is a free program offering immediate support to workers who are at risk of losing their job as a result of disability, injury or health condition.

Preparing and modifying the workplace has information on designing work to protect or promote health and safety.

The Workplace Adjustment Tool is a searchable database of products and solutions that can remove barriers to participation in the workplace.

Legal requirements to provide reasonable workplace modifications may stem from the:

> Disability Discrimination Act 1992
> Safety Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988
> Work Health and Safety Act 2011